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# Burned Evidence

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"The Second Chance," etc.



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## CHAPTER I

It was in the bleak December, that the red gods began their insistent calling through our austere, sedate law-offices, and Mr. Plummer, our senior partner, cocked his ear and listened a moment too long. The result was that he had an immediate revelation, that he must "go, go, go away from here."

He was an archeology hound; so, of course, the spots on the other side of the world at which he was overdue included Egypt, the plains of Ur—wherever there were diggings and discoveries. He had been plodding along so many years, that he felt criminal about starting off to enjoy himself without orders from a physician, or even a hovering-on-the-verge-of-a-nervous-breakdown excuse; but, with Mr. Schlessing, myself and his own inclinations all pushing him, he gave in and made his preparations to start.

Mr. Schlessing was up to his ears in a big corporation muddle; so most of Plummer's work would devolve on me, the junior partner, and in the fortnight before he left I was kept busy going over papers and getting the hang of the various interests he represented. I had also to meet a number of his clients, who for the most part politely expressed themselves quite willing to accept me as his understudy.

Plummer was the lantern-jawed, bilious type; but with excavations before him and the prospect of seeing things that would have given Praxiteles the inferiority complex, he had thrown off twenty years and showed an inclination to gambol like a stiff-legged puppy.

He came up to my desk and clapped a bony hand on my shoulder about twelve o'clock on the last morning of the old year.

"Dandridge, you've put in the entire holidays getting acquainted with your new responsibilities; down here every night poring over the files, burning the midnight oil. Seems to me, you've earned a little spree; I was going to ask you to dine with me at the club this evening and go to a play. But I've just been talking over the wire with Jerome Fossdick, and he tells me that he and his granddaughter

will be at the Plaza tonight to see the New Year in. He thought, if we could arrange to stop there after the show, it would be a good opportunity to meet you. I didn't believe there would be a chance of our getting a table; but I telephoned and found that a reservation had just been cancelled, so it looks as if we are predestined to go. You can, can't you?"

I couldn't. I had already accepted an invitation to an occasion of far gayer and more glittering possibilities than anything Plummer had to offer. But business is business, it doesn't wait on dancing feet; and orders is orders, especially when they come from old Jerome Fosdick. So I ditched the glowing hours with stoic resignation, and told Plummer I was at his disposal.

If the door into the unknown 1925 had swung open a little, I might not have had that pleasantly exhilarated feeling which came at the prospect of becoming the confidential adviser of Jerome Fosdick. Instead, I might have risen up and tied Plummer and bound him in a chair to keep him at home.

But the door remaining locked, I dined with him at his club, and learned all about archeology. Owing to his enthusiasm and wealth of theoretical and book information we arrived late at the musical

comedy. When it was over, we went on to the Plaza.

Our table was in a good location, and I enjoyed looking about. It was not the old, merry, care-free scene of the pre-Volstead era, but a rather pathetic and somewhat coarse simulation of it. However, in my present mood, I was inclined to a tolerant, even roseate view of things. My companion's fund of instructive discourse seemed at last to be running dry.

I nodded to an acquaintance or two about the dining-room, and recognized Atchison, the famous criminal lawyer, who was entertaining a typically Atchisonian group. He never drops the grand manner, and he composes a supper party in a restaurant as a popular musician might compose a symphony, partly to please himself, and partly to intrigue the public. It pays to advertise.

The World was represented at his feast by two exceedingly smart hostesses; the Flesh, by a well-known beauty or so; the Bar, by a prominent jurist; the Stage, by a sardonic-looking, foreign actor; the Church, by a clergyman noted for his wit. But even this array of all-star guests could not eclipse the suavely superb Atchison himself. Did he represent the Devil? No one knew. Well—he was



certainly a distinguished figure with his height, his tossed-back, heavy, iron-gray hair, his classic profile.

"There's Fosdick coming in," said Plummer suddenly.

Jerome Fosdick was, like Atchison, one of New York's characters, pointed out to visitors, and ranking with the Metropolitan Tower, Chauncey Depew, and the Woolworth Building. He was said to be over eighty; and as he did not go about much, I had never seen him before.

Surrounded as he was by a cluster of quite young men and girls, I did not get a good view of him until he sat down. Little and fat, this merry octogenarian looked more like Santa Claus than a retired general of Wall Street, who had pyramided his millions under the hottest fire, and was said to have retained his sense of humor even in his always temporary defeats.

Now a sense of humor is almost fatal to either a complete worldly or spiritual success, and a man who can set his heel on a tendency to see life as a jest, and achieve greatly, was to my mind a character worth studying.

He had an arrogant nose, with the high bridge that Napoleon banked on in his generals, and then

it wandered on and ended pointing upward—as impudent as an exclamation point. His wide smiling mouth turned up at one corner and down at the other. There was something freakish and perverse about his face, until you looked into his eyes. Age had not dimmed their pale glitter. There, lay the driving force of him—the vision which had unerringly discerned the exact psychological moment in which to be flagrantly reckless, backing his luck to the limit, or to lay down his cards and retire from the game.

His granddaughter leaned over to say something to him. Plummer whispered it was she, but I knew it before he spoke. I already had a rather extended newspaper acquaintance with her appearance; for every publication in town must have been equipped with a large, special compartment for her photographs. “When in doubt, play Sara Fossdick,” was the unwritten law of the Sunday pictorials. Sometimes they showed her topping the rails on a big hunter; sometimes, like a grotesquely disjointed doll, levitating on the tennis courts; or in leather and goggles, climbing into an aeroplane. Headlines announced her bizarre feats of adventure.

Yet she didn’t look Amazonian or weatherbeaten in the least. She was a slender girl, with blue-black,

shining hair; black lashes on an olive cheek. They swept up, and I felt an electric tingle go over me. The eyes were a light, clear gray, her grandfather's eyes. But I don't know how to describe her; I'm no word juggler. She was nothing like so pretty as some of the other women in the room; but she had individuality, a sort of a—oh, well, she kept me guessing.

She was dressed in something green, I think. She was either so well-dressed, or her personality was so marked, that you never noticed her clothes. The high lights of her that night were her eyes and a thin stream of diamonds and emeralds that ran about her neck and rippled down until they splashed in a pool in her lap. Sometimes she twisted them about her fingers—drops of dew and deep sea-water, quivering and leaping with light.

"Fosdick's given his order," said Plummer; "and now before it's served, you had better come over and be introduced." He got up and I followed him.

Old Jerome was genial.

"Well, Mr. Dandridge, you've been clever enough to win the moderate and reserved approval of both Plummer and Schlessing, which coming from them amounts to enthusiastic praise. You must be very able or very tactful. Which is it?"

I met him on his own ground.

"Able, Mr. Fosdick. I have every qualification but that of experience, and in any dealings you and I may have, I am looking to you for that."

"Easy." He gave a little hoot of laughter. "I have every known brand of it."

The turned up corner of his mouth went higher, wrinkling his cheek. But his eyes! Not a button on me had escaped them; and now he was visually stripping off all my outer habiliments, even my ease of manner, and inspecting the mechanism of my brain, psychology and emotions. A leisurely, cool and rather cruel process.

"I'm not sure that inexperience is not a better qualification for me than either of your partners has to offer," he said reflectively. "You are not case-hardened in caution yet. Ah!" bowing across the room. "There is Atchison. Know him? No? Charming man, a true collector. I take off my hat to him, and bend low—with my tongue in my cheek. Sort of an iron stag in a flower garden tonight, isn't he? I remember once, when I was coming over from the other side, he put an interesting question to a group of us in the smoking room.

"What is the most impelling phrase in the world?" he asked. "The one to which all hearts



vibrate?" One man answered this, another that; but he shook his head, until he finally gave the answer to his own riddle. "The most impelling phrase in the world," he said, "is: How would you like an adventure, with a bit of money on the side?" And, by George, he was right. How does that appeal to you, Mr. Dandridge? Adventure with a nice pot in it? Or the day's steady work, and the sure rewards of the conscientious plodder? Which?"

I gave a hitch of my shoulder.

"I like a full meal," I said. "Work for the meat, adventure for the salad, and romance for the soufflé."

He gave another hoot. Plummer had laid a hand on my arm, but Jerome Fosdick caught the other one and drew me down, so that Plummer couldn't hear what he said.

"Come to my house about noon day after tomorrow, and stay for luncheon. There'll be salad."

He said it so whimsically and yet pointedly, that I went back to our table with a feeling that he was seeking something more of me than purely professional advice.

I sat down with the pleasant conviction that virtue was its own reward. The party I had given up

looked tame and tarnished in comparison with the prospects this New Year's eve was faintly disclosing. Fosdick's hints of a waiting adventure! Sara Fosdick's tantalizing personality! Her magnetic eyes! I was conscious of an agreeable excitement over the possibilities before me, all the more stimulating because of their vagueness.

Plummer was talking about something—I don't know what—and I was murmuring, "Yes. Yes," when I saw heads turning toward the door. I followed the general impulse, and stared with the rest.

Billowing down the room, was a woman of vast size, trailed by three men. She wore a pink gown—satin, I suppose—the color of a ripe watermelon, with streamer things of black lace. Her enormous neck and chest were hung with all manner of jewels in Oriental settings.

"Who's the lady elephant all dressed up for the Durbar?" I asked Plummer.

"Haven't an idea," he said. "They all seem to be foreigners, except—Oh, I know him! That's Professor Hammersley of the Psychical Research Society."

Madame sat down, chattering to all her companions at once, and gave the waiter a number of emphatic orders in rapid French. It was evidently

her party. Then, turning, she spoke in Italian to one man, French to another, and English to the professor. Their table was comparatively near ours, and her voice had great carrying power; so I frequently caught a word or phrase. Her accent in each language was far from pure, quite vile in fact, but she made up for it in fluency.

She had immediately lighted a cigarette, and as she talked, her eyes rolled over the room. As they met Atchison's, their glances held for a second, but there was no recognition in either face: and then her large, avid gaze swept on to rest on the Fosdick party.

Her order was filled presently, and she fell on her *hors d'œuvres* as one who has fasted all day. I was to learn later, however, that fasting was no part of her creed. She continued to talk, smoke and cram food into her mouth at the same time; but even as her words poured out, and she made her easy, clickless transition from one language to another, her eyes were always returning to the Fosdick table. Her study of the girl and the old man was so intensive, that she seemed to be visually memorizing them.

As midnight drew near, the noise outside increased. It rose raucously above the babel of voices

in the room. Trumpets blowing, bells ringing, shouts, cat-calls, the ear-racking whirr of infernal noise-making devices.

The first whistle of the great steam sirens! It was then that I noticed a peculiar incident. The witty clergyman at Atchison's table had said something that aroused a great deal of laughter, and Atchison, smiling, his eyebrows humorously raised, had brought out a notebook and fountain pen and was apparently jotting down the epigram or whatever it was.

Then he tore the sheet from the notebook, although he still left it between the covers, and after the most fleeting of glances toward the lady elephant, lifted his cigarette and held it suspended a moment, while he said something to the woman on the other side of him. Oddly, he was holding the cigarette between his second and third fingers, with the forefinger lifted. I had seen him smoking a few minutes before, and if he had such a mannerism, I should have noticed it, having an eye for details.

I glanced at Madame. She was blowing rings of smoke in the air, but her gaze was not following them; it was on that lifted forefinger. The thing was all over in an instant, and I would probably



have given it no further thought, much less construed it as a signal, if the woman had not given a quick, involuntary nod, as though in comprehension.

"Just on the stroke of midnight," said Plummer, looking at his watch.

The lights went out. The new year was born in darkness. Then the lights dazzled on again. Happy New Years filled the air. Atchison was exchanging them with his guests. Madame Whosis was exploring a glittering bag. She spoke to the waiter, and he retrieved a small ball of paper from under the table and handed it to her.

Her table was in a direct line from Atchison's, and after seeing what I had, I couldn't help drawing certain deductions, fantastic though they might be. My interest in the incident was keen but detached. It would have been less detached, if I had realized the amount of speculation I would spend on it later.

"Well, the Orient is before you," I said to Plummer. "I wonder what lies before me?"

"1925," he said, getting up. "Come on. If I am sailing at ten o'clock tomorrow morning, I've got to be getting home."

## CHAPTER II

WHEN I woke the next morning, I wondered for a hazy moment if I had not traded personalities with Plummer. I had the feeling that it was I and not he who was to set sail that day for unknown shores. And then, as my scattered faculties began to assemble themselves and stand at attention, I realized that this impression was partly the result of last night's experiences, and partly induced by the remembrance of my luncheon engagement with Jerome Fosdick.

But what with the conclusions I had drawn from the one, and the conjectures I was entertaining about the other, my ideas were still a bit scrambled. However, as I tubbed and dressed, they wheeled into better marching formation, and by the time I sat down to breakfast I was able to put them through drill.

My first unmistakable perception was that Sara Fosdick had roused in me something stronger than mere admiration. My mind was stirred with a lot

of curiosity and speculation in regard to her that I longed to gratify.

The next conviction was that, although Mr. Fosdick's business with me might be of a legal nature, he had undoubtedly given me a hint there were other more exciting angles to it. Else, why had he taken the temperature of my taste for adventure?

The third was, that unless my eyes had deceived me, that blaring trumpet of a woman in the watermelon dress had some special interest in the Fosdick party and also in myself; for I couldn't escape the belief that something in Atchison's note had drawn her attention to me. The whole episode puzzled me. There must be a covert understanding between Atchison and herself; but if she was a client or acquaintance of his, why should the two so sedulously have avoided recognition of each other? Why, too, had old Fosdick taken pains to wedge the subject of Atchison into our conversation? And why——?

But there was no use mulling over the thing until I had talked more fully to Fosdick; so mentally I slipped a rubber band around it, and pigeonholed it for future reference.

I went to the steamer to see Plummer off; and

then, it being New Year's day, motored out to the country to play bridge all afternoon and dine, and spend the night with some friends.

I came back early the next morning, and put in an hour or two of work at the office before I left to keep my luncheon engagement. It was about half after twelve when I reached the Fosdick house on the upper East Side, or, rather, the Fosdick two houses; for, as Plummer had explained to me, the old man's residence, although a large one, could not begin to hold his various collections, so he had bought the house next door and used it as a private museum.

The butler admitted me into a wide, square hall, and went up a broad flight of stairs to inform Mr. Fosdick of my arrival. It was a gray day without; but the light, falling through stained glass, gave a glow of sunlight within, and I found enough of interest in what I saw about me to compensate for a longer wait than I had. There were cabinets filled with the color and the gleam of glass, and others in which were jade, rose crystals and ivory. Tall pottery jars and Chinese idols stood between these, and there were carved chests and chairs and settles, and hanging above them some marvellous rugs.

As I moved about looking at the different things,

a man came down the steps, and after a cursory glance at me, opened a door at one side of the hall, presumably leading into the other house, and passed through, the door closing behind him with the sharp click of a spring lock. He was a quiet-looking fellow, with shell-rimmed spectacles and a sort of an Oxford air about him.

Almost on his heels the butler returned, and following him up the stairway, I was shown into a large, bright room with a fire burning on the open hearth. Mr. Fosdick was in an easy chair beside it; while a woman, so singularly insignificant that she was noticeable, was just finishing some dictation he had been giving her. She passed me on her way out—a prim, mousey face, mouse-colored hair, mouse-colored clothes.

Sara Fosdick was there, too, sitting with her elbows on a table, her chin on her hands, staring into a large crystal ball on a bronze standard. She paid no more attention to me than if the cat had come through the door.

“Happy New Year, Dandridge.” Fosdick, rosy and smiling, none the worse for his outing at the Plaza, held out his hand. “I no longer bother to rise and greet my visitors. The operation of hoisting myself up and letting myself down again takes



too much time. Someone would make a fortune, if he would invent a derrick to raise and lower the aged. Sara," —in a louder tone—"Mr. Dandridge is here."

She lifted her cool eyes, nodded in a lazy way, and went back to her crystal.

"No need making inquiries about your health." Fosdick eyed me cheerily. "You look like the top of the morning. So we'll get to business." He twisted himself around, and screwed up his face. "I told Plummer I wanted you to revise my will. But that was camouflage. As a matter of fact, my will had its final revision three years ago, and I don't intend to touch it again. I've left everything, beyond a few bequests, to that girl there." He waved two fingers in her direction.

"The bequests," he went on, "are the usual ones —churches, hospitals, colleges, a few old servants. I've bought my seat in heaven, you see, and not neglected the publicity end of it; I'm nothing if not conventional. But Sara gets the bulk of what there is. No telling what she will do with it. I only wish I could be here to see. My motto in life has always been: Don't do anything, unless you get some real, solid fun out of it. But this time I will have to miss a mighty fine chance."

I threw a glance at the girl to see how she took this, but her face told me nothing. I wasn't sure that she had even heard him. Her whole attention seemed concentrated on that glass ball. She was opening her eyes wide and squinting them together again as she looked into it, her face almost down beside it.

"I have no secrets from Sara," said Fosdick, as if answering my unspoken question. "She knows all about my affairs. Bah! What right has an old man, a sick man, a man who may die any minute, to be bothered about affairs?"

"Because the worry is good for you." Sara spoke, without looking up. "It gives you something to think about, beside yourself. You are one of those poorly balanced creatures who live on excitement. I give you an object in life."

"I don't want any object in life," he sparred testily. "A man of eighty should be making his peace with this world and the next, and giving advice to the young, instead of gallivanting after excitement."

"That's you," she replied, still as if speaking on some abstract subject; "always trying to play the part of a worn-out, old man. Result of suggestions from the fool doctors you call in whenever you have

a growing pain. If you are treasuring any picture of me as the devoted granddaughter, smoothing your brow and beating up your pillows, you had better trade it off quick; because the minute you set up as an invalid, I'll leave you flat. The only medicine you ever need is a good fight."

"Well, it looks as if I might get one," he muttered, creasing up his face into an enigmatic expression; in spite of its many wrinkles, it was as elastic as India rubber. "And of course you say I like a fight, because you are generally at the root of it." He turned abruptly to me. "Do you know anything of the family history, Dandridge?"

"Very little," I answered truthfully. "I've devoted myself rather to the study of your legal and financial affairs."

"H'm!" He gave me one of those stripping glances of his, and said drily: "Most people have more curiosity."

"I have my full share," I acknowledged. "But in this case, I didn't suspect there was anything to be curious about."

"Well, there is," shortly, although I didn't feel that his gruffness was meant for me. "Z-z-z! Explanations are always tedious, if sometimes necessary. I hate 'em, but here goes. You see, I had

an only son, Sara's father. He was always a student and a dreamer. No taste for business. All that money meant to him was something you pick off a tree. I played the part of the tree. Most fathers would have forced him to go to work, and then have shortened their lives, cursing him and untangling his snarls. Not me. Another of my mottoes has always been: Live and let live. Hasn't it, Sara?"

"What?" Her abstraction was not affected. I had begun to realize that her power of concentration was so remarkable, she was really as much alone as if neither of us were in the room. "Oh, quite."

"My son, Alan, Dandridge, very early showed an interest in my then comparatively small collections, and gradually developed into a real connoisseur, an expert in several lines. His monographs are considered authoritative. You see, there is always some ground on which you can meet everyone, even a temperamental son. He and I met on the broad highway of art.

"The lad was a great traveller and a fine linguist, but he certainly was no complete letter-writer. He would send me consignments from here, there and everywhere, until I had to take the house next to this or buy a museum. The other house is jammed

now, and this, as you've probably noticed, is so full we can hardly move about. The inventories came with the consignments; inventories that were pretty full descriptions, I'll say that. He didn't mind writing *them*. But all he ever told about himself or his affairs was usually condensed in a scratch or so at the end, saying he was well, and very little more.

"Then finally, after a year or two of silence, I got a letter purporting to come from a friend of his, stating that Alan had died of fever in a village in the Andes, and had been buried in Buenos Aires. This fellow gave a detailed account of his illness, the burial, and so on; but he did not mention Alan's wife, or even that he was married.

"A few months later, a South American woman, whole or half Indian, appeared with Sara there, who was about two years old. Her story was, that she had been engaged by a Señora Fosdick about six months before to act as nurse for her child. The lady was very ill and very sad over the death of her husband, and had at last told the woman that she had only a short time to live; so she gave this nurse quite a large sum of money, her passports and passage, and instructed her to bring the child to me in New York. She gave her duplicate directions, one



in Spanish and one in English, to show in case she got confused.

"These were plainly written in either an American or English hand, the hand of an educated woman. Of course, Plummer sent a man down at once, and he found the marriage and everything perfectly regular. Alan Fosdick had taken the house, his wife had died there and been buried beside him in the cemetery. Plummer spent a lot of money trying to find out who and what Señora Fosdick had been previous to her marriage, but with no success. The child being dumped on me, I kept her. She is the image of her father. Sara!" lifting his voice, "show Mr. Dandridge your eyes."

She made no response at first, verbal or otherwise, to this peculiar request. Her lashes were down across her cheeks; then she lifted them suddenly in that way of hers, and looked at me as impersonally as if I were an optician.

I never wanted to kick myself so heartily as at that moment; for as I looked back to her, the blood rushed in a torrent to my face. Yet even in my confusion, my disgust with myself, there was a second of excited exaltation, a thrill, searing and ecstatic.

"Oh, certainly!" I heard myself stammering, as I

dragged my gaze from hers, and made a ridiculous pretense of looking at her grandfather as if to compare the two. "The Fosdick eyes! H'm; yes. Unmistakably."

Fosdick chuckled, and Sara turned her indifferent glance again to the crystal ball, while I sat raging. If this was a practical joke meant to embarrass me, old Jerome certainly had a most perverted sense of humor. But before I could make a further ass of myself, luncheon was announced, and we went downstairs.

The dining-room was large and very handsome; what is called a period room, I imagine. Old Flemish it was, I learned later, and very wonderful of its kind. The Oxford-looking man I had already seen in the hall was awaiting us, standing gravely behind his chair.

"Mr. Herbert, my curator, Mr. Dandridge," said Fosdick, and we shook hands and spoke a word or two. But I knew at once that the Dr. Fell feeling between us was mutual. During the progress of the meal, my faint antipathy toward him crystallized into active dislike. Perhaps, to be honest, it was because his cultivated accent seemed to fall pleasantly on Sara Fosdick's ear.

"Herbert is supposed to be a modern English-

man," said the old man; "but he really belongs to the Sixteenth Century. His life began with the Renaissance, and ended with it."

The curator smiled gently—somehow, that dreamy smile didn't fit his type of face—but he made no comment beyond the smile, and went on talking to Sara. Politely he tried once or twice to include me in their conversation; but it was over my head, and I was canny enough to keep out of it and not make an unnecessary display of my ignorance.

I know less than the dust about art. To me a vase is something to set on the mantelpiece; a teapot is to pour tea from; and when Herbert hauled an old snuff-box from his pocket, and Sara said that it was a Jean Petitot, while the old man almost wept over it, I couldn't think of anything but bewigged, beruffled gentlemen and brocaded ladies with brown soot on their upper lips. So distinctly outside was I, that when Fosdick got over his excitement, and was able to take notice again, his eyes showed a malicious twinkle as he watched me.

I was also aware that in Sara's estimation I was, probably, merely "six feet of clean, young American manhood," with no appreciation of the finer

things of life, good for nothing but to discuss legal problems with her grandfather.

Very well; she could think what she pleased, but she couldn't relegate me to silence. I picked out a current investigation of certain interests in which Fosdick was involved, and began to discuss the ins and outs of it with him, ignoring the other two.

Presently a heart of lettuce was placed before me, and Fosdick, putting up his hand, mouthed at me behind it, winking.

"That's only half the salad; the rest comes later."

Herbert glanced up quickly. Emphatically I am not "a student of human nature"—detestable phrase—but people interest me, people of all kinds and classes. There is nothing of the vivisectionist in me, I do not want to impale my subjects on pins and analyze them; but I like to get close to them and gain a hint of their motivation, and I don't think I am lacking in sympathy. But this Herbert eluded me. I couldn't diagnose him at all.

I have always noticed that every person has what you might call a seen and an unseen side; and the unseen side creates a sort of atmosphere about him—the successive layers of his past, welded together, speaking louder than any words he may say.

Maybe, disliking him, I was not a fair judge of

Herbert; but I couldn't get over the idea that he had not always been the mild scholar he now appeared. The next question of course was, what had he been? I couldn't answer that. I felt the atmosphere, but I could not penetrate it. Either it was too thick, or I was.

But I saw, when Jerome Fosdick made his cryptic aside—a sort of addendum to our conversation of New Year's eve at the Plaza—that Herbert had pricked up his ears and done his best to listen in. For a gentleman who dwelt in the Sixteenth Century, he seemed to take a pretty keen interest in the events of the moment.

"Now, Sara," said her grandfather as we rose from the table, "don't chase off somewhere; I want you upstairs. See you at dinner, Herbert."

He stopped in the hall, when Herbert had again vanished behind that closed door into the other house, to give an order that when Madame Adelbron called, she was to be shown upstairs at once.

Madame Adelbron? The name was vaguely familiar. I had heard it before. But I could not remember where.

In the sitting-room again, I held a light for Fosdick's cigarette, lighted my own, and then asked



him if he wished me to retire when his caller arrived.

The turned up corner of his mouth curled so high, that his eye was almost closed. The effect was a combination of a grimace and an ironic wink.

"You're here solely to meet her, my boy."

"Is she the salad?"

He gave his single hoot.

"Not what you would call either a fresh or a green one. But she's an adventure in herself, and certainly adventurous—you can spell that, 'ous,' or, 'ess,' as you choose; it fits either way. How have you escaped hearing of her? You should read the newspapers more thoroughly. Madame Adelbron, Dandridge, is one of the foremost psychics of the world. Predicted the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the exact date of the Armistice, the French occupation of the Ruhr, the death of President Harding, the Japanese earthquake. She is in this country at present, and everyone is fighting to get into her séances. Surely, you must have seen her at the Plaza night before last?"

My mind quickly sorted over the pack of cards which had been people on New Year's eve. There was, there could be but one who answered his description.

"That behemoth of a woman?" I exclaimed. "Pink, huge, jewelled?"

He grinned; but before anything further could be said, the lady was announced. In spite of her vast bulk, she swept in with a certain impressive effect, and immediately filled the room. Purple velvet; furs; a clanking of beads and chains; rolls of fat, in which the small features of her face were almost lost; and a heavy perfume which floated about her, and beat against the nostrils in waves.

"Mr. Fosdick?" She bowed. "Miss Fosdick?" Her voice trembled, she registered emotion. Fosdick presented me. She stiffened.

She sat down, furs and velvets billowing about her. I held my breath for a moment; but the Fosdick chairs were stout. Hers supported the strain.

"It is very painful to come here, Mr. Fosdick," she began. "Very painful, and yet,"—she shrugged her shoulders—"of a necessity." Her eyes were rolling around the room, taking in everything. "Do you wish the young lady here—while we talk?" She shivered at his quick nod. "Well," sadly, "it is not for me to dissent, if you—her grandfather—do not wish to spare her."

"I never spare my granddaughter," he said blandly. "Life will not; so why should I?"

Madame arched her brows until they vanished under a dangling feather on her hat.

"But a young girl!" She was shocked, she quivered like jelly. "Men do not understand." Crushed for a moment by this melancholy reflection, she rose to a noble indignation. "I love women, I understand them. Am I not one?" She touched her chest with a fat, pointed forefinger. "I would save her from a shock, a cruel blow, although mine must be the hand that—that—," She could not remember "deals," but she never stopped for a mere word, I was to learn, always using the first substitute that came to hand—"that smacks her. I beg you, sir, before she is hit in her tenderest, deepest feelings, her holiest faith——"

"Look here, Madame," Fosdick broke in. "You sought this interview, not I; so I make the terms of it. You requested to see me alone. I never see visitors alone, so please go ahead."

"Is it true, that men can be so hard?" Madame asked the ceiling. "Very well; I go ahead, sir. But, my child," to Sara, "you will remember that I, a woman, tried to save you this agony."

Sara looked as blank as the wallpaper. It was one of her best stunts, as I was to discover.

### CHAPTER III

“Now, Mr. Fosdick, I arrive at my business.” In the twinkling of an eye, Madame Adelbron became very cool and direct. “I met this young girl’s mother in Buenos Aires. She was living there with her husband, your son. He had gone into the mountains, and she was alone, desolate. We became friends. I loved her as my own sister, and the little one I adored. Then I had to go on tour, and I left with Estrella, your son’s wife, my jewels and twenty-five thousand pounds in English money. These she was to put in her bank for me. When I came back, I found that she had died, and the child had disappeared. I tried—My God, how I tried!—to gain some trace of my property. In vain. My jewels, my money were gone; my friendship betrayed. It was a blow to my heart from which I have never recovered.”

She leaned back, breathing hard, and took from a mat of cut steel and velvet, which I discovered was

a bag, a bottle of smelling salts. This she held first to one nostril and then to the other, inhaling deeply, until finally able to master her emotions, she again took up her story.

"My counsellors in the unseen, they helped. Their message was: 'Patience. Wait; all things will come to you.' I obeyed; I know their wisdom. I found resignedness and worked hard, trying to forget. At last I came to this country. I had not wished to come, but my counsellors insisted. It was a leading; for here—!" Ah, we were in for drama now. Her deep, vibrating tones were freighted with it.

"One night at the theater, less than a week ago, I saw this young lady, and she wore my necklace. Of the play I knew nothing. I saw nothing—only my jewels, and Estrella Fosdick risen from the dead. I asked questions. I made inquiries. I learned that the wearer of the jewels was indeed the daughter of the woman I had trusted, and who had played me false."

While she talked, Fosdick sat, head sunk on his chest, his eyes at their old trick peeling off layers of Madame's personality. It seemed to me that he was at once curious and infinitely amused, watching with zest all the woman's moves, and maliciously delaying his own. He reminded me of an aged cat



patiently eyeing the gambols of a bold, aggressive rat, and relying on his time-tried technique rather than his physical agility to conquer at the ripe moment.

From him my glance turned to Sara. She had grown noticeably pale; but her composure was untouched, and she was absorbing every word and movement of the seeress. Adelbron, I reflected, was of hardier stuff than I. She stood the combined battery of the Fosdick eyes without a sign of trepidation.

"H'm! So that is your story, Madame?" remarked old Jerome. "And now, unless I am mistaken, you are here to lay claim to the jewels and the money?"

"The jewels and the money, with interest on the money for twenty years. It does not repay me for my sufferings." Again Madame raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Exactly. But matters of this sort are usually conducted through one's attorney. Mr. Dandridge, will you talk to Madame Adelbron?"

I was no longer the mere bystander. Fosdick had waved his hand at me, as if to say: "Hangman, do your duty!"

"It is an amazing story, Madame," I began. "You

have complete proofs of your statement? Mr. Fosdick will naturally require that."

With a disdainful gesture, she lifted her bag and pulled apart the strings, drawing out a yellow, folded paper which she handed to me.

I opened it and discovered it to be a receipt for the jewels and money entrusted to the writer by Madame Adelbron. The jewels were listed as an emerald and diamond necklace, a pearl collar of several strands, fourteen rings—each described, and all more or less valuable—and a number of brooches, pins and smaller ornaments. The amount of money was stated; twenty-five thousand English pounds. The signature, Estrella Fosdick, was written in the same hand.

"I see," I said, passing the paper over to Fosdick. "Was the person who signed this document an Englishwoman? It is written in that language."

"She would talk or write only in English," Madame replied readily. "She wished to pass for an American. There were reasons for this, I have since learned. Ah, yes; reasons!" significantly. "She was Spanish, a dancer at Madrid in the theater there; and the police watched her as cats a mouse. She was in with a band of criminals. They were caught and punished; but she, through

the influence of an officer, was allowed to leave the country. She was glad to go, to go quickly with Mr. Fosdick's son, who was infatuated with her, and believed her slandered, pure as the snow."

I didn't like it. The woman, experienced as she must be, would hardly be making such claims unless she had a basis for them in fact, and a pretty solid one too. With the gullible flocking to her séances, she could not afford to be shown up in New York as attempting a swindle.

"Have you a lawyer?" I asked sharply.

For just a moment she hesitated.

"I need none," she said haughtily. "Are not the proofs there before you—in her own handwriting?"

"Nevertheless, you had better engage counsel," I returned. "Mr. Fosdick is a business man, and he will insist on this matter being conducted in a business way. He can hardly ask you to leave this paper in his hands, even if you were willing to do so; but we shall naturally want the opinion of experts in regard to its genuineness, and will also wish to make a thorough investigation of your statements concerning the late Mrs. Fosdick. For your protection in these inquiries, and also to expedite the affair, you will require the services of a reliable attorney."

Madame gave me a glance of resentment.

"I am alone," she said. "A woman, alone. To me it seems most plain. You have my word, you have seen the paper. But I do not know the customs of your country. I shall consult my friends."

She drew her furs tragically about her.

"Just a moment, Madame," Fosdick broke in as she rose. "You have performed your painful mission, and I, on my part, have turned the matter over to my lawyer. That leaves us free to discuss other things. Travel, for instance. I'm cooped up in the house now, and before that I was chained to work. A few months in Europe now and then was all I got; but you, Madame, have spent the years more profitably. You have walked up and down the earth, and to and fro in it."

I suspected Madame of a more or less intimate acquaintance with the Prince of Darkness; but she was evidently unfamiliar with the quaint account of his activities as given in the Book of Job. Nevertheless, although she failed to catch his drift, she took quick exception to his words.

"Walk?" she shrilled. "On my so small feet?" She thrust them out, as she spoke, in their dainty slippers with the bright buckles; and really they were

so astonishingly tiny that I could not understand how they supported such bulk. "*Mon Dieu*, Mr. Fosdick! You think I am—what you call it?—a hobo? I travel far; yes. In many countries. But always first class."

"Surely. Surely," bowed Fosdick, endeavoring to appease her. "You must pardon me, Madame. It was a crude way of putting what I meant; an idiom."

"Oh, an idiom!" She twitched her shoulder. Her beady eyes were on him, suspicious and baffled; plainly she was puzzled by the light way he was taking the explosive bomb she had cast. "I speak many languages well; but the idiom, it sometimes —" she couldn't remember "escapes"—"it sometimes slips off of me."

"Of course." The old man was sympathetically penitent. "But you certainly have a wonderful grasp of our language, Madame. I never saw anyone more quick at catching the meaning underneath the words. It's a great gift. I am no linguist myself, but I can admire and envy your facility."

The woman was becoming more and more at sea. She had fired her broadside, and there was no sign of wreckage; only an unruffled tranquillity, these fair phrases, an almost contemptuous urbanity,

She sat down again, pulling nervously at the strings of her bag.

"Now what I was leading up to in my imperfect way," Fosdick went on, "was that anyone traveling so widely as yourself, Madame Adelbron, must have met a lot of interesting people. Even a stick-in-the-mud like me hasn't gone through the years without acquiring a rather varied and extensive list of acquaintances. No doubt, if we were to compare notes, we'd find a number of these were mutual?"

"It is possible," Madame conceded warily. "But —" Her tonnage heaved, as if once more to get under way.

Again Fosdick stayed her with a detaining gesture.

"Oh, yes," he nodded, like a garrulous old man; "I have acquaintances, even friends, everywhere. In Europe, the Orient, South America, all over. And I keep in touch with them too; I write to them, and they write to me. In Spain—You, by the way, are Spanish by birth, aren't you, Madame?"

Adelbron did not answer. She was too busy appraising him; watchfully on guard against surprise, like the participant in a duel confused by an unfamiliar technique on the part of his opponent.

"Spain!" he repeated lingeringly. "One of the



most delightful correspondents I ever had was a Spaniard. His name?" He looked at the ceiling, and clicked his tongue against his teeth in irritation at his forgetfulness. "Gone; I can't depend on my memory. But it'll come to me later. A grandee he was, and all that sort of thing. Exquisite manners, tall, pale, heavy eyebrows, handsome—but one side of his face was badly scarred. A big, raised welt from here to here." He drew his finger along his left cheek from the outside corner of his eye to his mouth. "Upper lip slashed through; and another ragged seam along the jaw here," following the line of it. "Gad! I wish I could remember his name. But I have all his letters somewhere. I must look them up."

Madame's face had turned a livid yellow-white; her eyes were like live coals. She lifted one shoulder; she was a past mistress in the art of shrugging. It was a sign language in which she could express herself fluently. And now hers said as plainly as a shoulder could speak:

"I understand. You've won. But, so help me, I'll get even with you, if it's the last thing I ever do!"

She rose unsteadily. It looked for a moment as if her diminutive feet were not going to sustain her

weight. She clutched the back of the chair; then rallied, and with a slight, foreign inclination of her head swept to the door. I leaped to open it, and with one malignant glance at me, she passed through.

Old Jerome dropped back in his chair chuckling.

"Open the windows, somebody!" he ordered. "Whew! What a bombardment of perfume; I longed for a gas mask. Sara, have you no word of congratulation for Foxy Grandpa?"

The girl turned from the crystal ball to which she had reverted during the final tilt between her grandfather and his visitor.

"How much of it is true, Grand?" Something of the buoyancy, the unafraid challenge of life, was gone from her voice.

"None of it, child. Do you think, if it had been, I'd have let you hear it? Huh! I'd have settled with her right off the reel, and turned over the junk. But you're going to be a darned rich woman, Sara, and you'll have every scheme that her guild can invent tried on you; so I thought I'd give you something to cut your eye-teeth on. Some mouthful, eh, Dandridge?"

I laughed, but at the same time shook my head.

"You made her put up her hands," I said. "I

saw the gun, or, rather, heard it; but I don't know yet what sort of ammunition you used."

"Deadly for her game." His face wrinkled again with waggish amusement. "I'll tell you and Sara all about it some time. But not now; the interview was a little wearing. Hand me that new detective novel on the table, and let me rest. Thanks.

"Or, by the way, Sara,"—he roused up with a rekindled interest—"I was almost forgetting. The receipt that woman showed us for the money and jewels was a clever forgery of your mother's handwriting, and identical so far as the jewels were concerned with the list of them that you have. Now the question is, where did the forger get the original of that list? Do you remember an idea you had some time ago, that someone had been snooping around in your rooms while you were away? Tell Dandridge about it, and see whether he thinks there is any connection."

"Isn't that like you?" she giped at him. "When it happened, there was nothing to it all but my imagination working overtime. Such a thing was ridiculous. And now, months afterward, you suddenly find it has become important evidence. I wonder how on earth you ever got a reputation for cleverness."

Old Fosdick winked at me delightedly. He adored these saucy *ripostes* of hers.

"The facts are simply, Mr. Dandridge,"—she turned to me—"that I had been up to Lenox for a week-end last fall; and on my return, I was convinced as soon as I entered my rooms that some prowler had been there in my absence. There was no particular disorder; but some of the furniture was misplaced, as if the suite had been ransacked and a clumsy effort made to restore it to its original appearance. I called in the chambermaid, and the housekeeper; but they both denied having made the alterations. The maid said she had noticed them the morning after I left, but supposing I myself had changed things about, let them remain as they were.

"I was sure then that some one must have broken in, and we made a careful search to see if anything was missing. But nothing, not even a pin, was gone. In looking over my desk, though, I did discover a tiny, fresh scratch on one of the drawers, as if it might have been forced open. Yet the drawer was locked, apparently just as I had left it, and its contents were intact. I kept some private papers there——"

"Among them," Fosdick broke in sharply, "the

list of jewels in her mother's handwriting, from which this alleged receipt of Madame Adelbron's was undoubtedly copied." His face had grown grim and worried. Obviously he regarded this phase of the affair as far more important than the impudent claims of Madame.

"Some smooth, little Jim the Penman must have got in there, and made a transcript," he muttered. "But how did he manage it? That's the poser. By George, Dandridge, I've got a fortune tied up in that museum next door, and every protection in the way of burglar alarms and that sort of thing. Two watchmen on the sidewalk night and day. Yet apparently somebody walked right in, past all the bolts and guards, and got what he wanted. It's rather unsettling.

"Oh, well,"—with a return to his philosophic outlook—"I mustn't try to work it out now. I'll read and doze a while, and then take it up when my brain's more fresh."

He leaned his head against the padded back of his chair, and gave me his hand.

"I guess the show's over for to-day, young man. You've passed your matriculation very nicely. You'll do. We will have another confab very soon. I'll telephone you. Goodbye."

## CHAPTER IV

I EFFACED myself as rapidly and gracefully as I could. Jerome Fosdick had said in effect: "Here's your adventure; what's your hurry?" and there was nothing for me to do but metaphorically pack my adventure under my arm, and actually put on my hat and walk out the hall door.

In the streets again, I strolled on aimlessly, absorbed in my recent experiences. The part I had played in the scene had been a minor one. I had been called in more as a witness than a participant. Fosdick had needed no assistance. With perfect mastery of the game, he had led his opponent into an apparent security, and then suddenly, ruthlessly had used his knight or castle—whatever the scarred man represented—to call a checkmate. I wished, when he talked to Sara and myself afterward, that he had been willing to explain. It was tantalizing—like reading a serial story, with "To be continued," breaking the thread at the most exciting tangle.



Who was the scarred Spaniard, and why was the description of him enough to blanch Madame Adelbron's hardened and rouge-smeared cheek? I remembered the deadly malignancy of her eyes, the reprisals threatened by her lifted, eloquent shoulder. To a woman like that, envenomed, resourceful, unscrupulous, one repulse would not necessarily mean a finish.

Maybe, this uneasy, worried conviction was a premonition? I don't know. At any rate, I hoped that Fosdick would send for me soon, and conclude his story. Very soon; I wanted to see Sara again.

It was a gray afternoon, deepening to twilight; a raw east wind sweeping an occasional flurry of snow before it. Crowds hurried by me; but I was alien to them, in another world, companioned by Sara Fosdick. She walked beside me; that sudden lifting of her eyelashes, and I looked down into her eyes, down, down, down, until I drowned in them. Ah! I had the secret of her now. She was a witch. They used to burn women like her; the wise churchmen knew and feared their spell. Safety first.

I called a cab to escape her; but she crept in and sat beside me. Witches had mouths like that, maddening, daring you—warning you.

I thought I could shut her out, when I went to

my bachelor apartment. But there she was, lounging about my small library with her awkward grace. Is there such a thing as awkward grace? Anyway, she had it.

Obsession! Work is the antidote for that, but I had brought none home with me. A book? She would come between me and the pages. There was nothing to do but have it out with her.

I argued my case. Here was I, Anthony Dandridge, a young lawyer, keen on my profession, more ambitious than most men. It was not in my scheme of life to marry an heiress; and it was equally disastrous to be hopelessly in love with one. Either would mean an annulment of the career I had planned for myself. I wanted to pit my brains against the world, to become a tool so sharp that I could cut my way alike through cheese or through rock.

If I married—and I had had my dreams of that, too—it would be to a girl far different from Sara Fosdick. That girl's shadowy entity had long had its place in the back of my mind. Wistful, joyous, a little forlorn—and certainly not rich. An heiress, in the very nature of things, is an heiress. Consciously and subconsciously aware of the much she bestows, she inevitably demands more. Gradually

it becomes necessary to give an increasing amount of time to the management of her affairs and the gratification of her whims. The burden of great possessions would lie heavy on me, I knew, crushing out ambition and initiative until I was mere pulp.

No; Sara must be forcibly dislodged from my heart, ejected, set out on the sidewalk. I would, I must, be free. And yet, in spite of all my brave determination, I hoped her grandfather would send for me soon.

But the next day passed without a word from him. Sunday intervened. Monday, I heard nothing. Then on Tuesday, just as the afternoon was closing, Mr. Schlessing burst into my office.

"There's a rumor out that Jerome Fosdick is dead. Have you heard it?"

I was shocked out of speech. I could only stare at him, gripping the edge of the table.

"What!" I got my voice. "Why, I saw him, was with him on Friday. He was quite well then. But of course at his age——"

"Could you call up the house?" he asked. "Or would it——?"

I reached for the telephone; but before I could

lift up the receiver, the bell rang. It was Pardy, Mr. Fosdick's butler.

"Is that you, Mr. Dandridge?" His voice was hurried and shaken. "Can you come up at once? Mr. Fosdick was—was found dead in his car this afternoon."

"It is true then? I have just heard. Yes; I'll be there as soon as I can make it."

"The Fosdick butler," I explained to Schlessing. "He says Mr. Fosdick was found dead in his car."

"Ah-h? Heart failure, I suppose. Do they want you?"

"Yes." I was already getting into my coat. "There will have to be arrangements for the funeral and all that."

"Let me know," he called after me, "and if I can be of any help——"

My thoughts were chaotic on that journey up town. Apart from any material considerations, I truly regretted Jerome Fosdick's death. I had already begun to look on him as a mentor who stimulated and amused me at the same time. . . . And Sara! . . . Incredibly rich, infinitely removed from my toilsome sphere. . . . What was the story of the scarred Spaniard? Would it be found among

his correspondence? . . . Our firm would wind up the estate. . . . And then—goodbye, Sara!

The cab stopped. I paid the man, and turned toward the house. A group of newspaper men were clustered on the sidewalk, and I recognized among them Graham Smith. We had been at college together, and had kept up our friendship since, although I had not seen him in some time.

"Hello, Dandridge," he said, joining me. "What are you doing here?" He had pale, bulging eyes, meaningless when at rest but when anything caught his attention, they were full of swift surmises, easy to read if you understood his mental processes.

How they raced now, those surmises, one overlapping the other.

"How does Dandridge come into this?" he was thinking. "As a friend of the girl's? Must be pretty intimate to show up so soon. May be an engagement story in it. Or wait! This is professional. Plummer, Schlessing & Dandridge were probably the old man's attorneys."

To forestall a flood of questions, I enlightened him in regard to my errand.

"I came to see if I could be of any service. I've been acting as Mr. Fosdick's personal counsel in Plummer's absence. What are the details, Graham?"

"Nothing much." He yawned. Smith's specialty was murder and mystery cases, and he wouldn't have been on this assignment except for Fosdick's prominence. He was considered the best newspaper detective in town.

"Nothing much—so far," he corrected himself. "The old buccaneer died with his boots on, as I suppose he would have preferred. He seemed perfectly well when he started on his afternoon drive, so the housekeeper, Mrs. Hays, says. He told the chauffeur to take him down to Tiffany's; she don't know what for. I've got to find that out. Some present for the girl possibly. Stayed at Tiffany's about fifteen minutes, then came out as brisk as you please, and directed the chauffeur to drive up as far as Fifty-Ninth street, and he'd tell him then whether he wanted to go through the Park, or be taken home. As they neared the Plaza, the chauffeur asked through the tube for instructions. Got none, and asked again. No answer. He looked through the glass. The old fellow was all of a heap. Chauffeur, frightened, drew up at the curb, and tried to rouse him. Then called policeman on the corner. Cop called an ambulance surgeon, and they raced him home. But it was all over. Slight stroke of apoplexy, they say, and heart quit on him."



I nodded. It was of course what might have been expected at any time with a man of Fosdick's age.

"Yes," Smith agreed with my unspoken comment. "But listen." He dropped his voice in a way that suggested dark implications. "Inspector Curran drove up here shortly after the undertaker arrived, and has been in the house ever since. What's his business? That's what the boys are waiting around to find out," jerking his thumb in the direction of the group of reporters along the curb. "You don't happen by any chance to have a line on it, eh?"

I shook my head. "All I knew before I met you was the bare report that Mr. Fosdick had died. Surely, you don't imagine——?"

"Oh, no," Smith conceded regretfully; "there's probably nothing to it. If he'd been shot from the sidewalk, or somebody had jumped into the car and done him up, there'd have been the devil of a scene, and cops thicker than at a riot. The chauffeur might have bumped him off of course; but they've let him drive off to the garage without even a suggestion of surveillance.

"The housekeeper took a message from us up to Curran," he went on, "and he sent down word that he was merely here in the line of duty to learn if

any time had been lost in securing first aid, but that, being an old friend of Mr. Fosdick's, he was remaining a little while at the invitation of the granddaughter.

"I suppose that must be straight." He lighted a cigarette, with the bored resignation of one who, though cheated of his just dues, is trying to make the best of it. "Not because Curran says so, but because there's nothing to contradict him.

"I say, though, old man,"—keeping step with me as I edged toward the door—"I've got to build up a story out of this somehow. It'll be front page stuff of course. Keep your ears open while you're inside, will you, and tip me off if there's anything more in this Curran visit than appears. Failing that, what I shall have to depend on is atmosphere. Get me any little touches you can about the granddaughter, the stricken household, the heart-broken servants, all that sort of thing. You know. I'll loaf around until you come out."

I muttered something non-committal. It would be no use to try and shake him, I knew; but I resolved when I came out to be as blind and deaf and speechless as the three monkeys of Nikko.

Pardy, solemn and subdued, opened the door, and I gave him my card.

"Take this to Miss Fosdick, please, Pardy. I will wait here."

"Yes, sir. But Dr. Deane wishes to see you first in Mr. Fosdick's sitting room."

Dr. Deane? The physician in charge, I supposed. But why should he want to see me? Pardy must have made a mistake.

"Are you sure he mentioned my name?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. It was he who had me telephone you."

So Sara had not sent for me after all. But what on earth could the doctor want to talk to me about? I went up the stairs, and tapped on the sitting room door.

"Come in," said a deep voice.

A man standing on the hearthrug broke off in the middle of a sentence to ask inquiringly, "Mr. Dandridge?" and on my acquiescence shook hands with me.

"I am Dr. Deane, Mr. Fosdick's physician."

There were two other men in the room; one like himself of middle age, the other much younger. He introduced them briefly: "Inspector Curran. Dr. Walton, my assistant."

Automatically I shook hands with them, conjectures whirling through my brain. Evidently this was a conference to which I had been summoned;

but for what reason? A faint chill crept down my spine.

"I understand that you have recently been acting as Mr. Fosdick's personal attorney," said Dr. Deane. "We have sent for you in the hope that you might be able to assist Inspector Curran here in—er—certain necessary investigations. The fact is, Mr. Dandridge, we are strongly inclined to believe that Mr. Fosdick did not come to his death from natural causes."

He sat down, and as he talked, tapped his eyeglasses in the palm of his left hand.

"Upon a superficial examination," he went on, "and from our knowledge of the condition of the deceased, both Dr. Walton and myself were disposed to regard it as a case of cerebral hemorrhage. Mr. Fosdick was vigorous and well-preserved for a man of his years; but at eighty the arteries are treacherous, and I had repeatedly warned him against undue excitement or over-exertion. We supposed—and all the indications bore us out—that his age had simply exacted its claim.

"But later,"—he paused as if for emphasis—"the undertaker reported to me that he had discovered a small, fresh puncture just below the base of the left ear, made, one would judge, with a stiletto-like

instrument, but of insignificant depth—scarcely more than a scratch. Nevertheless, this taken in connection with other features of the case aroused our suspicions, and we set about finding the cause and nature of the injury. Dr. Walton,” glancing approval at his assistant, “suggested a search of the car, and discovered—Dr. Walton, will you show Mr. Dandridge the—er—exhibit?”

The younger man, flushing self-consciously, drew on a pair of gloves, shook something from a white envelope into the palm of one, and held it out to me. It was a small dart, needle-pointed.

“Bamboo,” he said. “It was lying on the floor of the car, probably shaken loose from the old man in the swift, convulsive movement that preceded death. Poisoned, of course. I retrieved it with gloves on, I can tell you.”

As I stared at the deadly splinter, the whole situation seemed horridly unreal. This was the sort of disconnected, sinister, bizarre thing one dreams.

“But Mr. Fosdick was the last man in the world to—to commit suicide!” I exclaimed. “Why should he?”

“It wasn’t suicide,” Inspector Curran spoke up. His voice was mild; he was a compact, grayish man with a tight, florid face and light blue eyes. “When

Mr. Fosdick was found, his hands in fur-lined gloves were in his overcoat pockets. If he had tried to drive that dart into his neck with those clumsy gloves on, he'd have fumbled, probably dropped it. No; he'd have taken off one glove. Then, if the poison was instantaneous, as the doctors think, he would not have had time to pull it on again, and put his hand in his pocket.

"It looks like this to me." He was sitting before a table, and he kept idly drawing lines on a piece of paper with his pencil while he talked. "Fosdick came out of Tiffany's, got into his car, and then after they were moving, gave the order to drive up Fifth Avenue. Evidently he was then all right. They made no stops until the chauffeur discovered his condition at Fifty-Ninth street, except at Forty-Second where, according to the chauffeur, they were held two minutes to let by the cross-town traffic. Undoubtedly, it was during this halt that the thing was done. The time was between ten minutes and a quarter after three; for the chauffeur says he noted by the clock in the traffic tower that they started again exactly on the quarter hour. While they were standing, this dart was discharged at the old man through the open window of the car; for, bundled up as he was, careful aim was required



to reach an exposed surface, and, had they been moving, the murderer would never have risked it."

"But it hardly seems possible, Inspector," deprecated Dr. Deane. "Even with the hurrying, indifferent crowds on Fifth Avenue, for a man to stop and take aim from the sidewalk would——"

"But it wasn't from the sidewalk, Doctor," Curran interrupted tranquilly. "Have you forgotten that the puncture was on Mr. Fosdick's left side? Here, I'll show you!" He drew a series of dashes to illustrate his words. "This is the Fosdick car on the outside of the up-town line, next the curb; chauffeur says so. Here, it stops at the signal. Up beside it ranges a car that had been trailing it—say, since the time it left Tiffany's. Fosdick is sitting on the left hand side of his car. The window beside him is down; it is a bright, clear day, and he likes the air. The window of the adjacent car is also down. Beside it is somebody—let's say, a woman;—scarcely three feet between them. With an air-pistol or blow-pipe she takes accurate aim, probably shielding the weapon from view with her muff, and lets the old man have it. Fosdick gives a start; but before he can cry out, or take his hands from his pockets, he collapses. Nobody, not even the chauffeur, notices him. The yellow lights go

on, and the up and down-town traffic starts again. The murder car follows the procession for a block or two, then turns off into a side street. The thing is over."

It was a vivid reconstruction of the crime, and one that could hardly be gainsaid. Dr. Deane nodded his acquiescence, and then asked curiously:

"But why a woman, Inspector?"

Curran hunched a dapper shoulder.

"Looks that way. A bit too subtle for a man. But, man or woman, it was a foreigner—a Javanese, Polynesian, or South American—or somebody who has lived in one of those countries."

A woman who had lived in South America! I gave an involuntary exclamation, but caught myself and turned it into a cough. Sara was concerned in this; those ugly accusations against her mother. I must consult with her before I said anything.

"Did you speak, Mr. Dandridge?" A quick, blue beam from the Inspector's eye darted in my direction. "No? Well, anyhow, I am hoping for some help from you on this case. You were Mr. Fosdick's personal attorney; you ought to know if he had any reason to expect this, if there was anything in his life that——"

"No." I stiffened; I don't think I gave any sign

of what was passing through my mind. "Mr. Fosdick's accounts were all practically closed; business, legal and, I imagine, personal. Besides, Inspector Curran, my acquaintance with him was very slight. Mr. Plummer, our senior partner, now abroad, introduced me to him on New Year's eve, and the day after New Year's I came here to luncheon and spent an hour or two talking to him and Miss Fosdick. I haven't seen or heard from him since."

Curran was touching up one of his drawings, his head on one side.

"H'm!" he commented. "And his secretary tells me, the old man has received no ambiguous or threatening letters, telegrams or messages of any kind. It all looks rather tight, but perhaps we'll be able to drill through it somewhere. Well——"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door, and Pardy, bowing to Dr. Deane, murmured:

"It's Dr. Ridgely, sir, on the telephone. He says that he will meet you at his laboratory in fifteen minutes."

Walton picked up his gloves and the white envelope, and he and Dr. Deane after saying good-bye left the room.

"Dr. Ridgely is the toxicologist," Curran explained. "But we won't know much more when he

gets through than we do now. It goes without saying, that dart was dipped in some undetectable, vegetable poison. They won't find a trace of it in the autopsy."

He fell silent, seemingly absorbed in his meaningless drawing.

"Nothing more that I can do for you, Inspector?" I asked.

"I believe not." He did not lift his eyes from the paper. "If there is, I'll communicate with you. Thank you for coming, Mr. Dandridge. Good afternoon."

I went out to find Pardy again, deciding to write, "Urgent," upon the card I had previously given him to take to Sara.

But Miss O'Connor, the secretary, came swiftly forward as I started for the stairs.

"How do you do, Mr. Dandridge," she intercepted me. "Miss Fosdick is waiting for you."

I do not think I have mentioned the mouse woman's voice, nor the impression it made on me the first time I heard it. Rich and soft, it transferred her from a nonentity into a personality. All the color, the life of her, was in it.

She led the way down the corridor, knocked, and then opened the door. Sara was standing by a table.

It had grown dark outside, but in here were mellow lights, and I noticed a faint, fresh fragrance as from pine branches.

Sara held out her hand to me.

"It was good of you to come," she said simply. "Just think; only a few hours ago, Grand kissed me good-bye when he went out! He wanted to go alone; to choose a birthday present for me, I am sure. Oh, why, why didn't I insist on some one, myself or Miss Mouse, going with him! I shall never forgive myself."

Miss Mouse? I couldn't doubt that she meant the secretary; and how apt and inevitable the name.

But now, as she huddled down in a chair, looking so wan, so desolate, all her proud defenses down, my whole heart went out to her. I wanted as I had never wanted anything before, to comfort, console her.

"No matter how much you insisted, if your grandfather wanted to go alone, you know he would have done so." It seemed to me an inadequate effort to lighten her regret, and yet it drew a faint smile from her.

"That is true; but—" She pushed her hair back from her brow as if she were tired of thinking.

"Oh, who could have done such a thing? And why would any one do it?"

She knew then. And I wondered whether, when she learned all the facts, the same insidious suspicion that had entered my brain would not form in hers. But if she did not voice it, I resolved not to do so. Not to-day at any rate. The agitation caused by her grandfather's death was enough for the present.

"Mr. Fosdick was a very prominent man," I suggested lamely; "and there are many cranks in the world."

"But cranks would have warned him."

"Maybe he did receive threatening letters, and failed to mention them for fear of worrying you."

"You don't know Grand. He never kept anything from me, good or bad. Several years ago, he got a lot of anonymous messages, promising that unless a sum of money was left at a certain place, the house would be blown up and all of us killed. He showed them all to me, and discussed our danger. It was on my advice, that he turned the matter over to the police. They got the man—a dangerous lunatic—just as he was placing a bomb in the cellar.

"No," she brushed away my futile suggestions; "there was no warning." Her voice dropped to a whisper, her eyes dilated. "I can't, I can't get that



last afternoon you were here out of my mind. That woman's face when Grand spoke of the scarred man! I had turned my back on her, but I saw her mirrored in my crystal ball. I often used that to study people, when I did not want them to think I was watching them. She looked murderous, I tell you.

"And Grand's—," her voice faltered— "this— this that happened to him is just the sort of thing that woman would do. That is the reason I told Miss Mouse to watch for you and bring you here. I knew you would tell me if I am wrong," —she pressed her fingertips to her temples— "if I am allowing my judgment to be swayed by the horror of it all."

But here at last I could reassure her.

"No," I said; "I think your suspicions are only natural. And I can tell you that I share them very strongly; for I, too, saw her look of baffled fury. Of course, that is a long way from convincing proof; but at least we have something to go on. The woman did come to your grandfather with a blackmailing proposition. That stamps her as a criminal to begin with. We saw him play with her, frighten her, and finally knock the thing in the head. We saw the fear and anger she showed,

when she realized her predicament. She is too clever not to understand that the matter might not end with her walking out of the house. Your grandfather, for all she knew, might be contemplating her exposure, and that would put an end to the easy profits she is reaping from New York's army of dupes.

"Now, I want to consult you." I paused. "When I talked with Inspector Curran a few minutes ago, and he asked me if I knew of any enemies your grandfather might have had, I held my tongue. I felt that I should speak to you before expressing any suspicion in regard to this woman. But if I have your sanction, I think I ought to tell him of her visit to your grandfather as soon as possible."

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "You must. I can't rest until you do. Grand was very old, but he enjoyed life. He was well and happy and—" She stopped with a sudden recollection, shrinking back and pressing her hands tight between her knees. "Will it all have to come out in the newspapers? Those things she said about my mother? I'd hate to have people think they might be true."

"Don't worry about that." Before I knew her, I might have jeered at the idea of Sara Fosdick's shunning any sort of publicity. "I think it can be

entirely avoided. You see, the woman won't do any talking; her lawyers won't let her. And on our side, I can see to it that only an expurgated version of the matter is given out.

"But remember," I warned her, "we are dealing so far only in conjectures. Until we have something more definite against the woman, you and I must both be careful not to give a hint of our suspicions to anyone except the Inspector."

"Of course. Of course," impatiently. "But go to him now, and tell him what you believe. Don't waste any more time."

Seeing her eagerness, I stood up. She gave me both her hands. They were like ice, and I pressed them warmly in mine.

"You have helped me," she breathed. "But go. Hurry!"

The Inspector was still in the living room, quizzing Mr. Fosdick's valet in regard to his employer's habits.

"When you've finished, I would like to speak to you," I said.

"Through now. Come in. That's all for the present." He dismissed the valet with a gesture.

I sat down at the other end of the table.

"Inspector, there was something I didn't care to

speak of until I had first consulted Miss Fosdick. It concerns her rather intimately; but she feels that you should know it."

"Yes,"—he gave me a quick glance—"I thought you might be holding back on me. I meant to see you again."

I began my story of Madame Adelbron's visit. Before I had finished the first sentence, his busy pencil stopped. He held it suspended until my account was completed.

"I wonder if this woman has a record in any other country?" he muttered. "Still that ought to be easy to find out. Lord!" He stabbed at the paper. "It's too bad that Fosdick didn't tell you the whole story. She sounds guilty all right; but if she's what she seems to be from your description, she'll be pretty well covered up. Know where she lives? If we're really on the right track, we don't want to lose any time. We want to tie up our loose ends—get the weapon if possible, and any other incriminating evidence—before she thinks she's suspected."

"She's stopping at the Hotel Mazarin, I believe."

"Good. I'll put a woman operative on at once to search her rooms, and we'll get busy checking up the movements of the Madame between three and four

this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Dandridge; this looks like a real clue.

"And, by the way," glancing up from the telephone while waiting for a number he had called, "no need to warn you against doing any talking, I suppose? But how about Miss Fosdick? You've already cautioned her, eh? Fine. We don't want the murderer to think, you understand, that there is any suggestion of foul play, or that the little wound and the dart that caused it have been discovered."

I left him still busy at the telephone, and went down the broad stairs to the lower hall.

But before I reached the foot of the steps, the curator, Herbert, sprang up from a window-seat, and I saw he had been waiting for me.

"This is shocking, Mr. Dandridge; shocking," he murmured, his eyes searching my face.

I had taken it for granted that Herbert enjoyed his position in the house, something of a sinecure; but I had not imagined that he felt any deep attachment for his rather sharp-spoken employer. Yet now the man's appearance and manner were those of one who had suffered a real bereavement.

"I have heard nothing except from the servants." The fellow was shaking, he could hardly control his

voice. "What do the doctors say as to the cause of it?"

"A stroke, I believe." I moved on toward the door, but he kept pace with me, and stood near while Pardy helped me on with my coat and gave me my hat.

"It's—it's a terrible blow to me," he half-sobbed.

"It's a blow to everyone associated with him," I returned curtly. I never could be anything but curt to Herbert. "Good evening."

I walked quickly through the door held open for me by Pardy; but paused on the threshold and glanced cautiously around, praying that Graham Smith by this time had grown tired of waiting and had gone back to the office.

He hadn't though. As I reached the sidewalk, he came flapping toward me. He walked like a penguin, and always had the solemn, absorbed air of one.

"Hello! Did you see the girl?" He put his arm through mine, and looked at me as if defying me to withhold a scrap of information from him.

"I saw Miss O'Connor, Mr. Fosdick's private secretary."

"O'Connor?" he repeated. "What's she like?"



Young? Beautiful? Much cut up over the old man's death?" The surmises were beginning to show again in his eyes. I think he already saw the headlines: "Multimillionaire Disinherits Granddaughter For Fair Secretary!"

"Miss O'Connor is like a quiet, little spinster mouse, and seemed perfectly self-controlled."

He lost interest.

"Well, tell me, what's Curran doing in there all this time? That's what I really want to know."

I threw veracity to the winds.

"Curran? Oh, I caught a glimpse of him talking to Mrs. Hays. She was pouring tea for him, and he looked very comfortable and settled. Rather a handsome woman, isn't she?"

Graham sniffed disgustedly.

"In there hobnobbing with his widow. She is a widow, I suppose; and he's a bachelor. And me standing around here stiff-legged in the cold! So that's all you can give me, Tony? As an information mine, you certainly run low grade. Well, bye-bye! I've got to be getting down town."

He disappeared in the direction of the subway.

## CHAPTER V

I WAS up almost with the dawn on Wednesday, and out to the nearest news-stand to gather in all the morning newspapers; then hurried home with them, and ran through the lot before breakfast, skipping the long accounts of Jerome Fosdick's life, and his various achievements and adventures in "big business," but studying attentively every sentence relating to his death. There was nothing in them to alarm the most imaginative murderer, not a hint that the old fellow's passing had been an interruption in the mysterious processes of nature.

I drank my coffee with a thankful heart. Curran was still able to push his investigations, unhampered by publicity. Madame Adelbron's vigilance might well be lulled by the attitude of the press.

The next two days were busy ones. Although I did not see Sara again, I spent most of the time at the Fosdick residence, and was constantly consulted by the various members of the household.

Sara relied on me to take charge, and I felt that I was relieving her by my supervision of details. On Thursday afternoon, her grandfather was laid away in his granite mausoleum at Woodlawn; then at last I felt free to devote myself to the problems arising from his sudden demise.

As soon as I reached my office on Friday morning, I had the old man's will brought to me; Plummer had told me before he left, that at Fosdick's request the instrument was kept in our safe.

The contents, I found, were as old Jerome had stated them the day I took luncheon with him. With the exception of certain charitable and philanthropic bequests, his entire estate went to Sara, and the will contained no clauses restricting her disposition of it.

Plummer, Porter Catesby, a business associate of Fosdick's, although many years younger, and Howard Jerrald, a banker, were named as executors. An excellent choice. They were all sound men.

I had previously cabled to Plummer notifying him of Fosdick's death, and now sent another message requesting instructions. Then I called up the Fosdick house, and asked Pardy to tell Miss O'Connor that I would like to speak to her.

In a moment or two her melodious, "Yes?"

answered me, and I explained that I would like to see Miss Fosdick on business during the day, and wanted to know what hour would be convenient.

"I think I can take the responsibility of answering that, without disturbing Miss Fosdick," she replied. "If you can be here about four o'clock this afternoon, Mr. Dandridge, I am sure she will see you."

"Thank you," I said. "And—er—I hope she has been able to rest a little?"

"Yes. Miss Fosdick has great vitality, and her courage is equal to anything. Of course, Mrs. Hays, the housekeeper, and I are trying to spare her as much as possible; but still there are many things that she only can decide, and people whom it is necessary for her to see."

"Naturally. Thank you again, Miss O'Connor. I shall be at the house at four."

I put down the telephone with the conviction that whatever changes might be made under Sara's reign, Miss Mouse was sure of her berth. Already, she had either assumed or been appointed to the position of Sara's private secretary.

It was now about eleven o'clock, and I decided to drop around and see Curran. I entered his office, eager to learn what progress he had made; but even

in the full noonday light, with the sunshine falling across his desk, I could glean nothing from the closed book of his face.

"Sit down, Mr. Dandridge." He waved me to a chair. "I suppose you have no new developments to offer?"

"No. I was looking to you for those."

He made a slight negative gesture with his hands.

"The lady is no longer at the Mazarin. She complained that hotel life affected her nerves, I understand, and checked out last Saturday to take a furnished apartment on Fifty-sixth street just off of the Avenue."

Tilting back in his chair, he hooked his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

"It happens," he said with a touch of significance, "to be quite well provided with convenient exits and entrances. Madame Adelbron's apartment, I have learned, is on the second floor; and from it one can reach the front door of the building either by a small elevator or by the stairway, while there is still another stairway leading down to a side entrance on a sort of a court. Anyone who didn't want to be seen leaving the building could do so with practical security by using one or the other of these stairways, and choosing a favorable time."

"I see," I murmured, to express my comprehension of the point.

"But that," Curran went back to his perpetual pencil-drawing, "is about as far as we've got. There has been no chance to search the rooms, as Madame Adelbron has kept steadily at home. The elevator girl says she has been ill ever since she came to the house a week ago, and had a doctor called on Monday last, and, she thinks, again on Tuesday afternoon, the day of the murder."

"There are doctors and doctors," I broke in quickly. "It looks to me like an attempt to bolster up an alibi. Who is this physician she had?"

"Dr. Simmons, a perfectly respectable practitioner of the neighborhood. Nothing to that." He shook his head. "But don't look so dashed. What the doctor may say when I come to question him is another story. I haven't cared to do so until I get some of my other lines straightened out. He'll keep. No use to stir up unnecessary speculation and possible gossip.

"For the rest," he went on, "everything is moving along. I've put one of my best women on in place of the regular elevator girl. She'll deliver the mail, and watch for a chance to search the rooms. Madame Adelbron has a middle-aged French maid,



she reports, who speaks some English and is inclined to be chatty; something may come of that. On the whole, the luck has broken as well as could be expected. I am now waiting for advices from Scotland Yard and the Paris *Surété*. We may be able to speed things up a bit, when they come in."

I could not help feeling disappointed at the paucity of results, but there was nothing to be gained by showing it.

"By the way, Inspector," I said, "I was more or less rattled when I talked to you on Tuesday, and there was a circumstance connected with Madame Adelbron's visit to Mr. Fosdick that I failed to mention."

"Yes?" He looked up expectantly. "I hope it clears up a point that I've been puzzling over. I have been studying that story of yours, and trying to analyze the blackmailing scheme. Now, look here; Madame Adelbron goes to Fosdick with a list of jewels and money. He claims the list is a forgery. That was what you said, wasn't it? Well," in answer to my affirmative, "how did Adelbron know enough about the things Miss Fosdick inherited from her mother to make that list an accurate one?"

"That is just what I forgot to tell you," I said, my respect for his perspicacity returning; and then

I repeated to him the story Sara had told of coming back from the country and finding a tell-tale scratch on the drawer of the desk which contained the original list in her mother's handwriting.

Curran said nothing for a few minutes after I finished, merely applied himself industriously to his meaningless pencilings. Finally, he pushed the scribbled sheet of paper away from him, and tilting back in his chair once more, fixed his eye on a spot in the ceiling.

"That scheme to gyp old Fosdick wasn't cooked up in a minute," he said slowly. "A forged list? H'm! You can bet it was a nifty one—no crude work—when they tried to roll him, and for such a stake. It was fixed up by one of the big 'uns, a fellow who understood all about papers, inks and the effect of time on a document. This isn't a one man or a one woman job; I can tell you that, Dandridge. They had the whole thing down fine, worked out to the last detail; and then Fosdick sprang the unexpected on them, something about letters from a scarred Spaniard, and Madame went all of a heap and got out quick. They were scared, they didn't believe Fosdick'd drop it there; and so they finished him. At least, that's the way it seems to shape up now.

"Let me see,"—he clasped his hands at the back of his head, "the funeral's over now, and the house reasonably clear, isn't it? Well, I want you and Miss Fosdick to comb through the old man's correspondence just as soon as possible, and get me that Spaniard's letters. Will you do that for me, Dandridge?"

"Will I?" I was delighted at the chance of doing something at last. "I have an appointment with Miss Fosdick for this afternoon, and if she is agreeable, we'll set about it at once."

"Those letters are the link we need," he nodded. "Must you go?" seeing me rise. "Well, let me know how you get along, Mr. Dandridge, and drop in whenever you feel like it. I'm a firm believer in coöperation." I left him to his penciling.

Four o'clock to the minute saw me at the Fosdick door, and I was shown at once into Sara's sitting room. She was all in black, subdued and pale; but she looked stronger, more poised than the last time I had seen her. I noticed with a little thrill of happiness that the roses I had sent her were about the room.

"You see your flowers. Thank you for them, and

thank you also for those sent by your firm yesterday. I shall write to Mr. Schlessing later, and to Mr. Plummer, too."

"I cabled Mr. Plummer this morning," I said. "I had to notify him of his appointment as executor; and I also communicated with the other two, Mr. Catesby and Mr. Jerrald. They both said they would be glad to serve."

"Yes; they have been here. I saw them. They are very kind." Abruptly she turned the subject. "Is there anything new in regard to that woman? Have you talked to the Inspector again?"

I told her that I had seen Curran that morning, and gave her the gist of our conversation.

She sighed. "I suppose it does take time, but I had hoped—" She sighed again. "I'm a frightfully impatient person. You will learn that, if you do not already realize it."

"No more impatient than I in this instance," I said sympathetically. "Curran certainly seems to be moving cautiously enough. Still, you know, a matter of this kind can't be rushed; there are a lot of threads to be gathered in. Meantime, you and I can perhaps help speed things up a bit."

"How?" She glanced up alertly.

"Well, for one problem, it would help tremen-

dously if we could determine just how Adelbron's forged list was obtained. I suppose in view of subsequent events, there is no longer any doubt that you were right when you believed that some one had broken into your room and gone through your desk, an expert forger who took time enough to transcribe or photograph the original list of jewels in your mother's handwriting. Now the question is, who was that intruder, and how did he get in?"

"A question, indeed!" She puckered her brows. "Grand and I were discussing that the evening after you were here, and neither of us could suggest an answer. The house is guarded, you know, like a bank vault; and there was no indication of a burglary elsewhere."

"That makes it almost certainly what the police call an inside job," I declared. "Probably one of the servants is implicated?"

The meaning of her expression as she listened to this suggestion eluded me. There was first a swift clouding as of doubt or uncertainty; and then a touch of amusement.

"You have met Mrs. Hays, haven't you?" she asked, it seemed to me, irrelevantly.

"The housekeeper, you mean?"

"Yes. Impregnable Scotch, and a moralist to the

backbone. And the house staff is her own selection, hand-picked. I tease her by calling them her Sunday School class. They have all been with us for several years."

"Nevertheless," I argued, "an expert forger was in your room—possibly for several hours. He couldn't have passed through the walls, or come down the chimney. Some one must have admitted him. Or else," I added, "it must have been a person known to both the outside watchmen and all the members of the household, and whose entrance and movements, if noted, would arouse no suspicion."

This time Sara did not allow her face to betray her; it was quite impassive. But I had seen her play that trick before.

"I think you have some one in mind, Miss Fossdick," I said quickly.

She gave a start, and a faint, perturbed crease showed itself in her forehead.

"Honestly, no," she denied with obvious candor. "I haven't the least reason to distrust anyone I know. What I possibly had in mind, Mr. Dandridge, is too vague to talk about. But I remembered that some one in the house has a—a feeling—hostility is perhaps too strong a word—against another person here. It wouldn't be fair to mention names now.



The matter has never been spoken of to me, you understand; but just the same I've noticed it more than once, and as I put a good deal of faith in the judgment of the one who holds this prejudice—it's a sort of watchful attitude more than anything else—I'm wondering if there are any valid grounds for it, or if it is just an instinctive dislike. That is as full an answer as I can give to your question."

She had picked her words with care, and I saw she did not care to go further at the time; so I let it pass at that.

"Another thing, then," I said. "Curran has suggested that you and I go through your grandfather's correspondence files, and find those letters from the scarred Spaniard."

"Oh, yes." She brightened, but almost immediately her face fell. "But the trouble is that Grand kept all his files in the safe in the museum."

"And you have not the combination?"

"No; that was one of the few things he never told me. Odd, too, because all my jewels were kept there—the ones my mother had and also the presents he himself had given me. That was to save the trouble of running back and forth to the bank, and whenever I was going out or wanted to wear any of the things, he would potter over and get them for

me. But why do you look so serious about it?" she asked.

"Because it simply stops the hands of our clock, when we want them to whirl around," I said, unable to conceal that I was discomfited. "It will be weeks now before we can get at those letters."

I saw by her lifted eyebrows that she did not understand.

"We can't open that safe until we get an order from the executors," I explained; "and they are powerless to act until the will has been probated and they are formally appointed—a matter of possibly a month or more at the soonest."

She stared.

"Do you mean to tell me, when everything is mine, that I can't open that safe, and take possession of my own property?"

"But your grandfather's documents are not your property until after the estate is settled," I pointed out.

"What idiocy!" She showed her inherent feminine contempt for the processes of law. "But you?" She turned on me like lightning. "You just asked me if I knew the combination? What difference would it make, if I had?"

"None," I replied. "Only we would have opened

the safe and got those letters, and no one the wiser." I did not attempt to excuse my peccability; it would have been useless.

But Sara looked at me as if I had risen several degrees in her estimation. She hesitated a moment; then stepped to a bell on the side of her desk and stood with her finger on it, until Miss O'Connor appeared at a door leading from another room.

"Miss O'Connor," she said imperiously, "I want the combination to my grandfather's safe in the museum. Will you tell me where I can find it, please?"

"Why—why, I don't exactly know, Miss Fosdick," the secretary faltered. "Mr. Fosdick probably kept it in one of his safe-deposit boxes. I can get you the keys to them, if you wish."

She turned to go for them, but I stopped her.

"Unfortunately, the safe-deposit boxes also cannot be opened, except by the executors," I said. "The banks would not permit it."

Sara flung herself down in a chair, and twisted her handkerchief with exasperated fingers.

"Ridiculous red-tape! The law is the fooliest thing on earth!"

"Inconvenient at times certainly, as in the present instance," I agreed diplomatically, "but, re-

member, without it there would be no order in the world."

"Order!" witheringly. "Who cares a fig about that? I don't believe Grand ever gave it a thought. He did what he wanted to. The old darling!" There was a break in her voice. "He used often to sing in his dear, cracked voice, 'Pack up your scruples in the old kit bag, and smile, smile, smile.'"

I was thinking how becoming anger was to her. Her eyes, with the clarity, the sheen of a mountain pool, darkened and deepened with that underglow of fire. Her high head; the color that warmed her cheeks. Then she turned to me, all of a sudden bewilderingly changed, wistfully penitent.

"Oh, forgive me, Mr. Dandridge! You've been too kind and helpful for me to show off one of my tantrums before you. Miss Mouse is used to them."

"Please don't," I said. "It is I who ought to ask forgiveness for bringing these matters to you now. You are overwrought and tired; I will go. But before I leave, I should like to ask Miss O'Connor a question, if I may?"

"Of course. I was going to lie down anyway. You two may stay here, and talk as long as you please."

Evidently she thought it something I did not want

her to hear, and her expression showed a little resentment at being shut out.

"No, no!" I cried hastily. "There is nothing private in this, or, for that matter, of any special consequence. It is merely a detail that I wanted to get straight in my mind." I was speaking to the secretary now.

"When I took luncheon here last week with Mr. Fosdick, Miss O'Connor, a Madame Adelbron called on him, apparently by appointment. Do you happen to know if he had had any previous communication or dealings with her?"

Although Miss Mouse had told Curran that the old man had received no ambiguous or threatening messages, it had struck me in thinking over her answer afterward that there must have been an interchange of some kind between him and the seeress; else he would not have been prepared for her visit, nor would he have given me that hint of something sensational in prospect on New Year's eve at the Plaza. The secretary had merely failed to recognize that there was anything equivocal in the incident.

"Madame Adelbron?" she repeated quickly. "Oh, yes; a woman of that name called him up twice on the telephone recently. He talked to her himself,

and as I was busy with my notes, I did not pay any attention. But I think he made an appointment with her. And immediately after he had talked to her the last time, he had me call up some firm down town. Let me see?" She knitted her brow. "I have it! Watkins & Streckheim."

I leaped in my chair. Watkins & Streckheim's was one of the largest private detective agencies in town. I had another crumb for Curran to peck at; and a worth while one.

"You don't remember any of his conversation with them?" I asked.

"No. He sent me down stairs just then with some instructions for the chauffeur, and by the time I got back he had finished."

"Thank you, Miss O'Connor." I bowed to indicate that there was nothing more. "It is of no importance; merely a cross-reference to some matters he wanted me to handle for him."

Sara's eyes had never left my face as we talked, and she must have seen that I was excited by the information I had gained; for now, as Miss Mouse vanished, she looked at me eagerly.

"That firm she mentioned is a detective agency," I told her. "Your grandfather undoubtedly had the woman investigated, watched, and the detectives'



report may be of great help to us. I must see Curran at once."

"And you will let me know everything that comes up, will you not?"

"Indeed, I will," I promised.

"You know," she detained me just as I reached the door, "you were wonderfully deft in the way you got that out of little O'Connor. She hasn't an idea of the demands that woman made on Grand, or that we suspect her of——"

"Very wise," I said. "Miss O'Connor strikes me as a model of discretion; but——"

"Discretion, thy name is Miss Mouse." She smiled faintly. "I'd trust her with my life, but I can't talk about this thing to anyone now—but you."

I went down the stairs in a glow of happiness. Those last words were more inspiring to me than any that had ever fallen on my ear.

## CHAPTER VI

LIFE, as I had known it, had always moved to sedate measures. It had been well directed for me by my parents; and when I took it into my own hands, it still proceeded ordered and controlled. A fling here and there perhaps; a little adventurous excursion to the side. Then back to the main travelled road again.

But now it had slipped the leash, and was outrageously on the loose. It pirouetted on the tight rope, it swung dizzily from the perilous trapeze; and I went about feeling like the old woman who had her petticoats cut all round about, and had to trust in the little dog at home to establish her identity.

The I, who was I, both by inclination and training was concerned with those principles of the law that apply to corporations, rather than with those dealing directly with lives and emotions. I had smiled with patronizing superiority when I had seen ponderous judges and fact-worshipping lawyers, like Plummer and Schlessing, poring over detective

yarns. I liked my reading dry, with no imaginative kick in it. And yet it was I who was actually living a mystery serial, and I felt that mentally I was lurching a little and that my perspectives were becoming slightly blurred and indefinite.

Some of these mixed reflections were passing through my head, as I pressed the Fosdick door-bell late in the afternoon, and was immediately admitted by Pardy.

"Miss Sara is in the drawing room," he said, and preceded me, holding back a black and gold portiere.

The flames were leaping up the chimney, the silver and glass on a tea table at Sara's elbows reflecting them in shattered gleams. The steam hissed pleasantly. Fire and a tea-kettle! These are enough to bring homeyness and intimacy into almost any room, but not to this stilted and formal apartment. It was designed for Watteau groups dancing the minuet, and it held out no welcome to a tired modern man who had come in from an icy January sleet and wanted to sit down and warm his hands and talk a little, and look more at the most fascinating enigma of a girl in the world.

Sara, with her elbows on her knees, her face in her hands, was staring down at the floor—so sunk in some concentrated calculations, that my entrance

startled her and she looked up with a scowl, followed unwillingly by a forced, conventional smile.

To my eyes, used to the opaque wet washes of gray outside, the room swam in color; firelight on yellow brocade and warm, mellow tapestries. And Sara in her mourning frock, etched against it, was a study in ivory and black, arresting and exotic with her red mouth and light, vivid eyes. Her personality as usual reduced everything else, even the splendors of light on color, to an unnoticeable background.

As I stood before her, she smiled again, more naturally this time, and drooped her lashes; and for the first time since her grandfather's death, the unsubdued witch peeped out.

"The antidote for weather like this is hot tea," she said. "Your order is now being filled." Her hands began weaving among the teacups. "There,"—she gave one to me, and pointed to some sandwiches and cakes;—"now you're all set. Have you seen Inspector Curran to-day?"

"Yes; I have just come from him."

"What does he know? What does he say? Tell me everything, word for word."

"Well, he has received his reports from the *Surêté* and New Scotland Yard. Adelbron is no

unknown name to either of them; she has been involved in more than one doubtful transaction. But there has never been sufficient proof to warrant a charge against her. It's what you might call a negative result; gets us nowhere in particular.

"And the same thing is true," I added, frowning over my cup at the fire, "of that hint or suggestion we gathered from Miss O'Connor in regard to the detective agency. As soon as I left you yesterday, I hurried to the nearest telephone booth and called up Curran. He agreed that your grandfather's employment of Watkins & Streckheim looked significant under the circumstances, and said that as he knew Watkins well, he would probably have no difficulty in learning what instructions had been given them. He did so to-day, he told me; but although he found out that, as we inferred, the firm was engaged to investigate Madame Adelbron and had been shadowing her up to the time of Mr. Fosdick's death, nothing was developed that furnishes us much aid. The agency reports show that in the week before New Year's the woman made two visits to the office of Heywood Atchison, the criminal lawyer. Otherwise, her movements were of no especial consequence."

"Mr. Atchison?" Sara exclaimed. "Why, I

know him, and so did Grand. I shall ask him what she was consulting him about."

She frightened me, and I spoke more emphatically than I intended.

"You must do nothing of the kind. It would ball things up frightfully. Atchison is not giving away professional secrets even to you, Miss Fosdick; and if he is advising Madame Adelbron, your questions would only put him on his guard."

She lifted her shining, blue-black head, and opened her eyes.

"Are you suggesting that a man like Mr. Atchison would countenance that woman's attempt to swindle Grand, Mr. Dandridge? How stu—, I mean, malicious of you."

I should have remembered that she was not one to mince words; she hewed to the line, and let the chips fall where they might. Yet I winced. She did not know it, but she was rubbing salt into a raw wound.

Less than an hour before, Curran and I had also clashed on the subject of Atchison; for when he spoke of Adelbron's visits to the lawyer, it brought back to my mind that surreptitious communication between the two in the restaurant on New Year's eve.

"But if she had already met Atchison and was going openly to his office," I asked, as I finished repeating the circumstance, "why all this subterfuge and maneuvering?"

There was a deep, skeptical twinkle in the glance Curran shot at me.

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Dandridge," he said, "I am inclined to think that bit of hocus-pocus was rather in your eye. Suppose the woman is a client of Atchison's? He had a big supper party of important people on, the kind he plays about with; and he'd hardly bother to notice every odd fish that happens to consult him, and who might be among those present in a public place. And that signal, and the note rolled across the floor?" He drew down the corners of his mouth. "Too cheap and tricky for a man of Atchison's standing. In all that midnight hullabaloo, he could have sent a slip of paper to her by a slick waiter, and no one any the wiser. No; I don't want to hurt your feelings, young man, but I'm afraid your eyes were a little crossed."

"All right. We'll let it go at that," I returned. "I admit the force of your reasoning; but I *saw*."

I expurgated this argument, though, in my report to Sara. I was not going to increase her scorn of me by buttressing it with Curran's derisive cavil.



Instead, I went on with the account of his activities.

"He has seen the doctor Adelbron called in," I told her. "A first class man, he says. No question about him. And none apparently in the story he gives. He saw her for the first time on Saturday a week ago, when she came to his office. She was rather hysterical and complained of headache and nervousness; so he prescribed a mild sedative, and advised her to go home and go to bed. On the following Monday he was sent for to come to her apartment, and found her still complaining of nervous chills and headache, but with very little actually wrong so far as he could determine. He told her to stay in bed and continue the medicine he had given her, and left, promising to visit her again on Tuesday morning."

"The day, poor Grand—." Sara's mouth contracted; she stopped suddenly.

"Yes," I assented. "But next morning she telephoned him to say that she was feeling a little better, and asked him to postpone his call until between three and four that afternoon. Note that, please," I stressed the point as Curran had stressed it to me; "she named the time. And the doctor accordingly made his visit about half-past three; he is certain that it was not later than a quarter to

four. The maid took him into Madame's bedroom. He found her sleeping soundly and did not waken her, as the maid told him that, although she had passed a restless night, she had been improving all day. He felt her pulse and listened to her breathing; and as both were practically normal, let it go at that, and came away. And the lady had established a perfect alibi.

"Curran thinks now," I quoted him again, "that, although the actual firing of the poison dart must have been assigned to another, Adelbron planned or was cognizant of every detail, and in order to forestall any suspicion that might be directed against her, took these measures of protection."

"How imbecile!" Sara threw up her chin impatiently. "The sleeping woman was not Adelbron of course, but a substitute. That silly, old doctor simply——"

"No," I interrupted her. "The inspector would hardly have overlooked so obvious a suggestion. Dr. Simmons, while admitting that the shades were drawn at the bedroom windows, is positive in his assertion that it was Madame Adelbron and no one else. As he says, she is not a person to be easily mistaken, and he had seen her on two previous occasions.

"So that, as Curran puts it," I went on, "is set-back number one. And what he calls set-back number two, is that Miss Ray, the operative he planted as a telephone girl, although she succeeded in searching the apartment, found nothing resembling a weapon. This Gertie Ray, however, is thorough, he says; a pin can't hide from her. She brushes up everything, trash or diamonds, into her little dustpan; so she brought in a scrap of something, that Curran admits has got him guessing.

"It seems, he explained to me, that late on Tuesday afternoon Madame had a bonfire. It wasn't built for warmth; for she is always complaining that the apartment is overheated, and usually has a window or so open. The inference is then, that she rose from a sick bed, if she ever was really in it except for the doctor's benefit, and burned something in haste. 'Here's a bit that Gertie Ray retrieved from the ashes,' he said. 'What do you make of it?'

"But it stumped me as it had him," I told her. "Perhaps you can puzzle out what it is. I got him to loan it to me to show you."

Sara drew from the envelope I put in her eager fingers a fragment of thin, scorched canvas. She turned it over and over, studying it, feeling the

edges, holding it up to the light; and then she got a magnifying glass and pored over it.

"It must have been a portrait done in oils," she said at last, "I can't reconstruct another thing from it."

"Neither could we," I said. "And the Adelbron's reasons for burning a portrait might be many, and all quite innocent."

"Baffling old devil!" Sara muttered; there was a flash of fire in her eyes. "This scrap, as you say, may amount to nothing; but I'm sure that I owe Grand's death to her. It's a big debt she owes me, and I'm going to collect every farthing of it. Some way, I must manage to meet her. Set a woman to catch a woman."

These intimations of hers, first of speaking to Atchison about Adelbron, and next of matching wits with a woman who had made a science of outwitting and outmatching her opponents, alarmed me. If Sara Fosdick had a whim to hurl herself into this very grave affair, Heaven only knew what the consequences might be. It would be like throwing an electrified monkey-wrench into a piece of delicate and complicated machinery, which required a trained hand like Curran's to manipulate it at all. The qualities in her which had delighted her grand-

father, her audacity, indifference to danger, and her dare-devil courage, would not enchant the hard-boiled inspector. Her coöperation was the last thing he would welcome or even tolerate.

"Curran, too, is anxious to interview her," I said diplomatically. "You might arrange it with him. But it seems to me that you have your work cut out for you right here in this house."

"And woman's place is in the home. You forgot to say that, Mr. Dandridge."

I was unmoved by her sarcasm. The contingency was too serious.

"It certainly is in this instance," I returned. "Curran is deeply interested in some of your household."

"So am I," darkly. Then she seemed to catch herself as if she regretted saying it.

I lighted a cigarette, and mentally debated how much I should give her of the text of Curran's next remarks.

He had fallen silent, as he sat industriously working on his geometrical designs. Suddenly he pitched his pencil across the desk, and clasped his hands at the back of his head.

"I tell you, Dandridge, there's someone in the house who's in with the gang that engineered this thing; but I'm thinking we'll have to look higher

than the servants. The men I have put in there, one as kitchen-helper and one as Pardy's assistant, don't think there's anything doing; and, by the same token, they doubt that either the day or night watchmen would have risked their high-paid, loafing jobs when, if anything went wrong, they would be the first to be suspected. Eliminate the servants and the watchmen then, at least until we get more of a line on them. That leaves the curator, the secretary and the housekeeper. Which would be the object of your suspicions, or do you bunch them together?"

"No," I said; "I think I'd center on Herbert."

"You don't like him," he interrupted. "Why?"

"For the same reason that I don't like shellfish. If you'll tell me why, I'll be obliged. Herbert and I are just not kindred souls."

"How do you feel about the secretary?"

I smiled involuntarily. Miss O'Connor was more a mouse than a woman to me. But somehow it didn't seem fair to present the little creature to him in caricature; so I compromised by answering vaguely:

"Why, she doesn't let you know much about her."

"Secretive, you mean?"

"Not exactly that. It's more—more as if she

had been a dependable, efficient machine for so long that she has forgotten how to be a human being."

Curran recovered his pencil, and tapped it against his teeth.

"I can't remember any woman forger." He seemed to be thinking aloud. "Of course she might have smuggled someone else in, or, for that matter, be working with Herbert. Herbert?" He squinted his glance at the ceiling. "I've got to keep my eye on that bird, not omitting the other two. Coming back to the secretary, though; the man who's been watching her trailed her to a queer part of town the other day, and then lost her. He says she threw him off like an old hand at the game. I switched him, and put a fellow on that she won't be able to dodge. Herbert, on the other hand, has made no suspicious moves; and the housekeeper hasn't been away from the house."

The bit of information about Miss Mouse surprised me.

"But," I expostulated, "Miss O'Connor was the one who told me of Mr. Fosdick's connection with the detective agency."

"Well, the agency didn't hand us much, did they?" replied Curran. "She probably knew they couldn't."

I wondered now, sitting there in the drawing-



room, if Sara's cryptic remark to the effect that she also suspected some member of her household was directed at the secretary.

"Frankly," I said, "Curran thinks the enemy in the camp is either Mrs. Hays, Herbert, or Miss O'Connor."

If she felt either surprise or annoyance at this statement, she did not show it.

"That doesn't require much intelligence," she said coolly.

I leaned nearer her.

"Which is it?" I whispered across the tea-table.

She looked back at me with that level, irritatingly blank gaze of hers; and in the second that our eyes held, there was a faint, disconcerting change in hers, a gleam of resentment, almost of antagonism.

"I'll tell you, when I know more about it."

Bewildered or hurt, a man invariably turns to his cigarette case. It creates the diversion, the pause necessary for readjustment. With Sara and myself, only a day or so ago, it had been, "The little more, and how much it was." This afternoon, for no reason that I could imagine, she had placed me at an immeasurable distance. With only the tea-table between us, warmed by the same fire, I had yet been relegated to the planet Mars.

I reverted to the inspector as a shield to hide my wound.

"Curran would like to know how your grandfather happened to engage both Herbert and Miss O'Connor?"

She wrinkled her forehead.

"I think Mr. Herbert brought letters of introduction; I've forgotten from whom. And no doubt Miss Mouse had recommendations and references. They would be in the document safe, I suppose. But of course," sarcastically, "they couldn't be got at for ages, because of the barbed red-tape fence about it."

"Oh, I spoke to Curran about that to-day," I broke in, meanly glad to have a chance at tit for tat. "I told him that my practice being a purely civil one, I had advised you to the best of my legal knowledge; but, nevertheless, I had a pretty certain conviction that, through some procedure of criminal law with which I was unfamiliar, he would be able to get at the safe and the deposit boxes."

"You didn't tell me anything of that sort," she flashed back.

"I waited to be certain first. Curran says there will be no difficulty about it. He has only to go down to the District Attorney, and get an order to open the safe."

"And when will he do it?" Her palms were pressed together so tightly that the flesh showed white around them.

"Probably very soon. He said, in a day or so."

"Oh, you men! *Mañana por la mañana!* With the clippers in your hands, you stroll around the red-tape fences, and then sit down to rest a while, when—." She checked herself, and let her lids droop over the lightning of her eyes.

"I'm sorry." She sprang up impulsively, and coming from behind the table, stood by the fire smiling at me. No matter what she did or said, she could always rely on that irresistible, repentant smile to win her full and free pardon. The distances between us vanished; I was no longer on Mars. "Forgive me. You have been so kind, so thoughtful; and I—Oh, well, if you don't know it already, you'll soon learn it; I'm a hellion."

"I like 'em." I, too, had risen. "I always have been crazy about hellions."

She showed the tips of her white teeth, wrinkled up her nose, and then the perplexed lines showed in her forehead again.

"Oh, it's all such a muddle! We're all stumbling about in a blind alley, even your praiseworthy inspector. But I'm going to explore it to the very

end. There's a door hidden somewhere in the shadows; and I'm sure—sure as that your name is Anthony Dandridge and mine is Sara Fosdick—that Adelbron holds the key."

"Then let's explore it together," I begged. "Give me your confidence. I have felt all this afternoon, that you are holding back something you know or suspect. Tell me what it is. We can't any of us play a lone hand; we must all work together."

Her eyes, baffling and enigmatic, drifted from mine. Her one-sided smile, a quaint, lovely replica of one of her grandfather's grimaces, made dimples in her cheek.

"Oh, yes," with enthusiastic mockery; "let's all work together, and talk, and talk, and get nowhere, and do nothing."

"What's the use?" I shrugged my shoulders. "We're at cross purposes this afternoon. I'm sorry I came. Good-bye."

She didn't say a word, make a gesture to detain me; just touched my hand, and let me go. And I turned up my coat collar, and tramped miles through the snow, telling myself over and over that Sara Fosdick would have to whistle pretty loudly before I returned. The overtures would have to come from her. I was through.

## CHAPTER VII

I TURNED to work as the dwellers in a cyclone country flee to their earth cellars. It was humiliating to feel that Sara, whom I had resolved to exclude from my thoughts, had in some way gained the upper hand, and now she—or, to be quite correct, the image of her my heart held—and my cold commonsense were in a pitched battle.

And then, the next night, when I was sitting up late, toiling over a brief, my telephone rang and her voice, hurried, agitated, sounded over the wire. Even through so ghostly a medium it set my heart to beating faster.

“Oh, Mr. Dandridge, are you there? I know it’s a frightful imposition, but can you come up? Someone broke into the museum to-night, drilled the document safe, and all my heirlooms and jewels are gone.”

“Good Lord! The document safe? Are your grandfather’s files disturbed? Those letters, you know?”

"Ah-h!" Her voice broke in a gasp. "I can't say. I have just discovered it."

"I'll come immediately," I told her, "and bring Curran with me."

I called him up then, and was lucky enough to get him without delay. At my news, his low whistle sounded through the telephone.

"Right on the job, aren't they?" he said. "Do you know—? But no use asking questions now. I'll pick you up in my car in ten minutes."

Arriving at the house, we were shown into the library. Sara was not there, but Herbert and Miss O'Connor were. Herbert, his hands in his trousers pockets, was scowling and biting his lips as he walked up and down the floor. Miss O'Connor, composed as usual, was primly seated, her little feet neatly crossed, her arms folded. I had a swift vision of fire and flood and earthquake, and Miss Mouse seated just so, amid the ruins of a devastated world.

They looked surprised to see us, but Curran wasted no time in explanations.

"Perhaps, since Miss Fosdick is not here," he said to Herbert, "you can give me the details of this robbery?"

"Eh? Oh?" Herbert came to a stop beside the

table, and looked at us with harassed eyes. "Certainly. I will do what I can. Miss Fosdick says she came in late, and noticed that the connecting door between the two houses was slightly ajar. She began to investigate, and discovered that the door of the room holding the document safe was unlocked, and the safe itself was open. She roused me then, and I dressed hastily and came down. I don't know what to say about it." He looked utterly nonplussed. "The keys to all the rooms of the museum were on a ring which never leaves my person. There they are." He unhooked the chain from his vest, and laid a bunch of keys on the table.

Again that bewildered look. "It's incredible, impossible. But,"—he threw out his hands—"it happened." He sat down wearily. "You can understand the state I am in," he said.

"Were you at home all evening, Mr. Herbert?" the inspector asked in his mildest, most confidence-inspiring tone.

Curran's manner is so matter-of-fact and unhurried, his voice so quiet, that he allays the tremors of the most frightened witness; and Herbert under that calming influence made a more successful attempt to pull himself together. He leaned back in his chair as he answered, and relaxed a little.



"I had an engagement last night to dine with Professor and Mrs. Markham at their apartment on lower Fifth Avenue. The Professor has recently added to his numismatic collection, and he was anxious to have me look at his new finds. About five o'clock, I went over the museum thoroughly to see that everything was locked up; really a mere form, as the rooms are never opened except under my supervision, but a form that I never omit. Then I went to my own quarters and dressed, leaving the house about five minutes of six. I was not due at the Markhams' until seven; but the night was fine, and I had decided to walk part of the way at least."

"Had the night watchmen come on then?" Curran asked.

"No; the day men were still on duty. I spoke to one of them as I came down the steps. I walked over to the Avenue, and about two blocks down I met an acquaintance, Surreen, the interior decorator. We walked on together as far as Fortieth street. He left me there, and I went on a block or two further, and then, fearing I might be late, took a bus."

"At what street?"

Herbert looked at him helplessly.

"Really, I— Somewhere in the Thirties, it was. But I didn't notice the exact street."

"Not important anyway," Curran remarked. "Go on."

Herbert took up his story again.

"I dined with the Markhams, and remained there until after eleven. Then I came directly home, and let myself in at the hall door of the museum. Everything was quite in order, and I went up to my rooms which were also in order."

"One moment," said Curran. "Would you have noticed if the door between the two houses had been slightly open?"

"I should, indeed," positively. "I always give a thorough look around before I go to bed, and I invariably try that door. It was closed and locked."

While Herbert and Curran talked, I covertly studied the effect of their words on Miss Mouse. She listened intently, her bright, glancing eyes turning from one to the other; but it struck me that her interest was oddly detached. The only reason I could think of for this was that Herbert's story was a twice-told tale to her.

"You came in about half-past eleven?" the inspector was saying.

"It was just a quarter to twelve by the clock on

the mantelpiece, when I got up to my sitting room."

"You saw nothing to arouse your suspicions?"

"Nothing whatever; and I may say that about fifty dollars in bills which I had carelessly left lying on my desk was still there. The burglary must have occurred between the time I went to bed, and the arrival home of Miss Fosdick, approximately an hour later.

"When she called me," Herbert continued, "I threw on my clothes and hurried down. She showed me the safe, and I blew a whistle from the window for the night watchmen. We found the burglar-alarms about the safe disconnected; but nothing in any of the other rooms had been disturbed so far as we could tell, and we made a thorough search of all of them." He took out his handkerchief, and wiped his face. "My word! I—I was lost in a fog. I am still."

"I'd like to talk to the night watchmen," Curran said.

I started to rise, but Miss Mouse was before me; and seeing this, Curran addressed himself to her.

"Will you tell them, please, to come here in about ten minutes. I want Mr. Herbert to help me out a little further first."

She whisked from the room, but returned almost immediately to say that a man named Cramer wished to see the inspector.

"My assistant," Curran nodded. "Let him come in."

A man in plain clothes, discreet and commonplace in appearance, came in, whispered a moment to his chief, and then took a chair by the wall.

"Those keys?" Curran motioned to the ring on the table. "There are duplicates, I suppose, Mr. Herbert?"

"Yes; Mr. Fosdick had them. I don't know what disposition has been made of them. Miss Fosdick can tell you, no doubt."

Before Curran could ask any more questions, Sara appeared, followed by Miss O'Connor. She looked pale, and her eyes were darkly circled.

Curran and I rose.

"I was just asking Mr. Herbert, Miss Fosdick, about the keys to the museum. He says that in addition to the set he had, there was a set in the possession of your grandfather. It raises rather an important point, as it seems probable that the crooks who planned this robbery managed in some way to secure an impression of one or the other of these sets of keys."

"Not of mine." Herbert spoke quickly. "Until I placed them on the table yonder, they have never left my person."

"And certainly not of mine." Sara spoke with equal positiveness. "My grandfather's keys were in a secret drawer of his desk, and I have just satisfied myself that they have not been touched. That is what has been keeping me."

"Ah?" Curran raised his brows. "Well, we will go into that later. Now I would like to see the safe."

Sara led us into the hall, and then dropped behind the others to speak to me.

"The letters are gone," she whispered.

I was appalled; compared to this loss, the mere theft of her jewels assumed a secondary importance. But seeing her dismay, I tried to smile reassuringly.

"Perhaps they were not in the safe," I whispered back. "Very likely we shall find them in one of the deposit boxes."

I lost no time, however, in drawing the inspector aside, and passing on the information to him.

"I expected as much," he nodded gravely. "It's all one proposition, you see; the blackmailing demand, old Jerome's murder, and now this robbery, merely the ramifications in a big play at the Fos-

dick money. The crowd back of it had to have those letters. I knew they'd be after 'em."

"Why then—?" I broke in sharply, but he answered the question before I could finish it.

"Why did I let them get away with it?" he said. "Because they outpointed me. I haven't a single excuse to offer, Dandridge. As I say, I knew they'd be after the letters, and I wanted them to try it. That is the reason I delayed getting an order from the District Attorney to open the safe; thought I'd leave the letters for bait. And I wasn't relying only on the burglar-alarms and Fosdick's watchmen, either. I've had men posted around this house, like it was the sub-treasury in a dynamite scare. But with all that,"—he could not wholly conceal his chagrin—"they put it over on us. I tell you, when we tackled this bunch we had our work cut out for us.

"Still,"—he brightened up a little—"I'm not counting this altogether a total loss yet. A safe-cracker can't help leaving a few autographs around, and the chances are we'll be able to read 'em."

By this time we had reached the small room containing the document safe; and the inspector and his assistant immediately began a complete examination of it.

"Neat job," Curran commented. "Whose work does it look like to you, Ben?"

The assistant coughed behind his hand.

"Might be—." He murmured a name or two which I did not overhear.

Curran nodded; and the two began going over the marquetry floor and inspecting the disconnected burglar-alarms in a search for evidence.

"Not even the smudge of a finger-print," the inspector remarked. "No yegg did this; it was an old-time professional." He turned abruptly to Herbert. "Who does the dusting and cleaning of this museum?"

"A maid from the other house named Alice, but always under my supervision. The objects in the cases, I never allow anyone to touch but myself."

"I'll be pleased to meet Alice. All right, Ben. Let's go."

They went from attic to cellar, with the rest of us trooping behind. But every room was locked as Sara had said she found them, and the heavy padlocks and fastenings on the basement doors and windows had not been disturbed.

As we came back into the hall of the dwelling-house, we met Miss O'Connor who informed us



that the watchmen were on hand, waiting in the library.

Four men were standing there, two of them looking a little tousled from hasty toilets, while the other two were explaining the reason for their unusual summons. They all stopped talking and shifted uneasily, as Curran entered the room.

He singled out the two day men for interrogation first.

"Did either of you see anyone you didn't know coming or going from either house yesterday?"

They looked at each other, and one of them scratched his head.

"Not at the back. That's where I was. Some tradespeople came to the door with orders, but I know all them."

"And how about the front?" Curran turned to the other one.

"Same thing, sir. Some packages were handed in; the postman." The fellow began to check off on his fingers. "Then there was a messenger boy with flowers, and about five o'clock a big car drove up. Three people got out."

"Mr. and Mrs. Herrin and Mr. Davenport," Sara said. "Old friends of the family. I saw them in the drawing room."

"No one went in by the museum door?" probed Curran.

The watchman shook his head, but his associate quickly spoke up.

"Yes; there was, too," he said. "It was while you was off to lunch, Tom, and I was watching both ends. About two o'clock a man rang the bell, and Mr. Herbert let him in. He was a kind of old, preacher-looking guy with a gray beard."

"Professor Quigley, one of Mr. Fosdick's scientific friends," Herbert said in answer to Curran's glance of interrogation.

"Now, the night watchmen," said the inspector. "Did any persons or person not known to you two leave or go into either house during the evening?"

"No, sir." They spoke together; and then one of them added:

"Miss Fosdick, she went out about half-past seven, and come in around one. She's all I saw, but maybe Harvey——"

"The only one I saw," Harvey vouchsafed, "was Mr. Herbert. He went in around eight, and came out about an hour or a hour and a half later. Then he come back, and went in at eleven or a little after."

A sensational moment. I suppose each of us felt an electric thrill run down his spine. I know I did.

Every eye was immediately focussed on Herbert. He was staring at the watchman like one suddenly confronted by a vicious wild beast.

"Me? You saw me?" he cried hoarsely. "But that's a monstrous lie!"

"'Tain't neither," Harvey bristled. "I guess I know you, don't I? And I seen you come in, and go out, and come back again, just as I say."

## CHAPTER VIII

CURRAN turned sharply in his chair to face the curator.

"You say, that you did not come back to the house about eight o'clock, Mr. Herbert?"

Herbert shook his head, apparently beyond speech; and then his sunken chin shot up.

"Emphatically not," he declared. "I spent the entire evening, as I told you, with—. But I forget, you have only my word for that. Er—Mr. Dandridge, you know the Markhams, I believe? I would be very much obliged if you would telephone and ask them to state the time I arrived at their apartment, the time I left, and whether I was out of their sight for a moment during the evening."

"Excuse me, Mr. Herbert, but I am conducting this inquiry, and I prefer to do it my own way."

I could see from Curran's extreme placidity of expression that he regarded the Markhams as possible accessories to the crime, and the thought set

the corners of my mouth to twitching. Markham was a scientist of reputation; and anyone who knew him and his vague, mid-Victorian wife would understand the absurdity of such a suspicion.

"But I really must insist on someone seeing the Markhams," Herbert was repeating in icy, Oxford tones. "I claim as my right an investigation of this man's outrageous statement."

"Rest easy," Curran said gently. "It will be investigated."

He scribbled a line on a slip of paper and handed it across to his assistant, who coughed and started to leave the room.

"Wait a moment, Inspector," I interposed. "I know the Markhams quite well; and perhaps, as Mr. Herbert suggests, it would be better for me to see them. They are unworldly people, and I am afraid if you send one of your men down to rout them out at this hour, it will shatter their scholastic calm and frighten them dumb. Besides, I am sure they will talk more freely to me."

"Good idea," Curran assented. "I wish you would drop down there after breakfast, Mr. Dandridge, if you don't mind. But this," drily, "is another line. Go ahead, Ben."

Then, with the departure of his assistant, he

turned again to the watchman, Harvey, who, evidently overwhelmed by the attention he had drawn to himself, stood nervously shifting his hat from one hand to the other.

"Take your time," said Curran in his mildest tone. "I want you to tell me how you know that the man who went into the museum last night and came out later was Mr. Herbert."

"Why, I saw him," Harvey answered, after swallowing once or twice. "He had on that light gray overcoat he wears and gray hat, and——"

"Did you see his face?" Curran interrupted.

The watchman hesitated.

"Well, come to think of it, I didn't exactly. I was down by the corner when he drove up in a taxi, and seeing who it was, I didn't trouble to look at him close. But 'twas him all right. I'd know that walk of his anywhere, and the way he sorta wriggles his shoulders. I seen him pay the taxi driver, and then he went right up the steps and opened the door with his key."

"How was it, when he came out? Did he pass you, or go in the opposite direction?"

"He didn't do neither. When he came out the front door, there was a taxi passing. Mebbe, he'd been standing in the vestibule watching for one.

He whistled, and when it drew up to the curb, he locked the door, and run down the steps and got into it."

"You are willing to swear then, that the man was Mr. Herbert?" asked Curran.

Harvey shuffled his feet again.

"I don't know as I could absolutely swear to it," he said, "not seeing his face, nor speaking to him. But his clothes and his build and all was the same, and he had his hat drawed down over his forehead a little to one side same's Mr. Herbert does. I'll tell you, if 'twasn't him, it sure was his twin."

"That's all now," Curran gave a nod of dismissal. "You may go."

As the watchman with his associates filed through the door, Herbert seemed to wake from the rigid state in which he had listened to Harvey's disclosures.

"By Jove! That's clever, you know," he exclaimed. "I was so taken aback at first by that oaf's ridiculous assertion, that my wits were paralyzed. But the solution is easy enough. The safe-breaker, whoever he was, impersonated me as the one way to get in and out of the museum without detection. Eh, what?" He turned toward Curran.



"Possibly." The inspector was non-committal. But Herbert went on excitedly:

"They must have been studying me, don't you know; picked a fellow to look like me, and copied my clothes. Extraordinary!" He wore a curiously perplexed, almost dazed expression, as if in spite of the solution he offered, he was still puzzled.

Curran made no comment; he seemed absorbed in shading a cube he had outlined. Then abruptly he shifted his line of inquiry.

"I'd like to know something about that old man you admitted to the museum yesterday afternoon?"

Herbert gave a slight, almost imperceptible start, or, rather, a quick tensing of the shoulder muscles.

"I think I told you that it was Professor Quigley," he said stiffly. "He explained that he was writing a paper on Chinese glazes—that is his hobby, I believe—so I took him into the two rooms containing the Chinese potteries. But my presence seemed to make him restless; for he muttered something about craving the balm of solitude, and finally told me outright that he could not concentrate on his researches unless he was alone. I humored the old fellow then, and left him to his meditations."

"You know him well? Is he associated with any college?"

The curator made a negative gesture.

"Personally, I know nothing about him. I have only seen him twice before. Mr. Fosdick brought him over to the museum, once quite early in the autumn, and again about a month later."

Curran was not drawing now; he was softly tapping the rubber tip of his pencil on the table.

"How long was he there alone, and where were you in the meantime?"

"I went into my little office at the head of the stairs, and took up my typing of a new catalogue just where I left off when he came. As to how long he was there alone, I can't tell you accurately; but it was most of the afternoon. Of course, I see where your questions are tending, Inspector." Herbert permitted himself the trace of a smile. "But if you could see him! A quaint, old character. A gentleman and a scholar and all that, but distinctly pottering. The thought of him being the confederate of thieves, or of himself drilling a safe is laughable. Besides, if he had attempted anything of the kind, I could hardly have helped hearing it."

"Did you see him before he left?"

"Oh, yes; my office door was open, and when he came by, he stopped and chatted a moment or so. Then I went down stairs with him, held his over-

coat for him, we shook hands, and he trotted off. A confederate?" Herbert mused. "Someone sent to look over the ground? It's possible of course; anything is. And yet I can't believe it."

At this point we were interrupted by the return of Curran's assistant. The inspector listened to his brief, whispered report; and then waving him aside, swung around again to Herbert.

"I won't keep you any longer now," he said formally. "But until Mr. Dandridge here has seen your friends at Washington Square, and corroborated the story of your presence there last evening, this man," indicating the assistant, "will go wherever you do about the house. There must be no telephoning, Ben," he added.

Herbert looked martyred, but said nothing; and Ben coughed as a sign that he understood what was required of him. He was sparing of words, but free of coughs. And, although they all sounded alike to me, his chief seemed to know the difference between the acquiescent and negative ones.

During this, Miss O'Connor had whispered something in Sara's ear, and Sara agreed to whatever it was, or so I took it, for the little creature now left the room.

"Miss O'Connor has just reminded me that it is

nearly six o'clock. I am sure that you all must feel the need of breakfast," Sara explained. "She has gone to give the order."

"Thanks," said Curran gratefully. "I, for one, would like some coffee."

"And I," said Herbert haughtily, "would like to get properly dressed, if this—er—policeman will accompany me."

Curran nodded; and the two went out, leaving Sara, the inspector and myself alone.

"What do you make of it, Inspector?" I asked. "Is the night watchman lying, or Herbert?"

"What do you think?" he countered.

"Not the watchman," I answered. "If I am any judge of a witness, he was telling the truth to the best of his recollection. On the other hand, it hardly seems reasonable that Herbert would stick to a story which, if false, can be so readily punctured by the Markhams. There seems nothing for it, but to accept his theory of a cracksman made up to counterfeit him in both appearance and manner.

"And yet," I added, "somehow—it may be prejudice—I can't disabuse myself of the idea that Herbert was not telling the whole truth."

"H'm!" Curran put his pencil into his pocket. "Well, I'm not quite ready yet to give an opinion.

But I can tell you one thing, Herbert's story of spending the evening with those people at Washington Square is absolutely straight."

"You have heard from the Markhams?"

"No; I left that for you, and I'll be glad to have their corroboration. But I know already what they'll tell you. When I sent Ben out a while ago, it was to get a report from the two men I've had shadowing Herbert. They say, he went to this professor's place in just the way he describes, staid there all evening, and came away at the hour he names."

"The watchman was lying then, you mean? Or possibly mistaken?"

Again Curran shook his head.

"The watchers I had posted here at the house bear him out in every detail. They claim, like him, that Herbert, or somebody who looked exactly like Herbert, went into the museum about eight o'clock, and came out again a little before ten."

"The safeblower impersonating him," I exclaimed, "just as he suggested. Well, Herbert's skirts seem to be clear at any rate."

"I'm not eliminating anybody yet," said Curran quietly. "Remember, whoever went into the museum at eight o'clock had a key. He could not have

got that without the help of someone in the house.”

Sara had listened to us in silence, glancing interestedly from one to the other of us as we spoke, but offering neither comment or opinion; nor could I gather from her expression what she was thinking.

As for myself, though, I’m free to confess that I was feeling anything but encouraged. The Spanish letters—our one clue to the murderer of Jerome Fosdick, our single line of defense against the blackmailers—were gone, and to me the recovery of them looked pretty hopeless. Useless to blink at facts; the robber or robbers had made a clean haul and got away. Curran was simply muddling around in a fog. I could not see that he had made any progress whatever in clearing the thing up. Small wonder if Sara blamed my negligence and procrastination for the catastrophe that had resulted.

I must have shown something of this; for Curran leaned over and clapped a hand down on my knee.

“Don’t look so downhearted, Dandridge,” he said. “If it will raise your spirits any, I’ll tell you and Miss Fosdick just one thing more. I know who drilled that safe. But please don’t ask me anything beyond that. I’m not ready yet to talk.”

I don't believe that his injunction would have stopped me from putting a question or so; but at that moment Pardy summoned us to breakfast, and we all went downstairs. At the table, I was too upset to show any appetite, and Sara made only a pretense of eating, while Miss Mouse nibbled furtively at a bit of toast; but Curran, I am bound to say, did full justice to the food that was placed before him.

Finally, as he finished a cup of coffee, his third, he gave a sigh and turned to Sara.

"If you don't mind, Miss Fosdick, I'd like to go over the papers in that safe—just to make sure. Dandridge," with a glance at a tall, grandfather's clock in the corner, "it'll be an hour or more before you can call on these Markhams. Suppose you come along and help me?"

So we went back to the broken document safe, and searched through its piles of docketed and card-indexed letters and papers, but found no trace of the Spanish correspondence old Jerome had mentioned, nor anything to indicate it had ever been there.

"A clean sweep," Curran observed appreciatively. "Even the index cards have been lifted. Whoever did this knew what they were about. Which convinces me more than ever that it was an inside job."



## CHAPTER IX

WHEN the inspector and I returned to the library, we found that a fire had been kindled during our absence, and was now crackling pleasantly on the hearth. Lighting a cigar, Curran seated himself before it, and motioned me to a chair opposite him.

"Dandridge," he said thoughtfully, "we're up against brains. Whoever is directing this thing has got every move figured down to a hair line, and is taking no chances. They're dangerous, too; ready to stop at nothing. Balk them, and they strike. Look at what happened to old Fosdick. If I were you, I'd advise the young lady to keep out of it; better still, to slip quietly away somewhere—West Indies, South America, Egypt—the farther, the better."

"Advise?" I sniffed. "Miss Fosdick, Inspector, follows only her own sweet will; and that at present is centered wholly on unearthing her grandfather's murderer. You might as well argue with the tide. Any idea of excluding her from the affair, as the saying goes, is 'out.'"

"Too bad." He frowned at the fire. "We've got enough on our hands as it is, without the added responsibility of protecting her. You talk to her anyhow. Try to impress on her that we're fighting no ordinary crooks, but a bunch of wolves. A bunch of wolves," he repeated, "with a head to plan for them that's keener than a fox. She can't sit in the game with that crowd. If she attempts it, she'll lose her entire fortune, maybe her life. Make that plain to her, Dandridge, and——"

"And spur her on to even more venturesome extremes?" I cut him short. "No; the one way you'll ever pry her off this mystery, is to clear it up. And the chances of that," I said unkindly, "don't look any too auspicious."

Curran's brows ruffled slightly, and he moved from the fireplace to the table where he could ply his pencil on those interminable designs.

"Rome wasn't built in a day," he returned. "And as I told you, I'm bucking brains on this proposition. More than that, I'm up against a puzzle. Some things are clear as day to me; some are as thick as pea-soup.

"Now you'd say, wouldn't you," there was a tinge of sarcasm in his voice, "that this robbery was committed by the fellow who got into the mu-

seum last night by posing as Herbert? Well, it wasn't.

"No," he went on, evidently enjoying his little triumph; "a job like that was never done in less than three hours, and this double of Herbert's according to my men was only there an hour and forty minutes. He went in at five minutes after eight, and came out at a quarter to ten. On top of that, he was a young man. Young men lack the knack and the patience to do such an expert piece of drilling; they're soup-men—nitro-glycerine, you know. This was the work of a high-class old-timer. You can narrow 'em down to four or five. As a matter of fact, from certain other indications, I have narrowed it down to one, the 'Missionary.' "

"The 'Missionary?' "

"Yes; an old scoundrel that I've heard was once really employed in the mission field out in Persia or somewhere, and trades on his knowledge and his clergyman's voice and appearance to get by. He goes around soliciting money for the heathen, but that's only a stall to get him into banks and financial institutions so as to spy out the lay of the land; for he's a top-notch at any kind of a safe."

"Professor Quigley!" I exclaimed with sudden enlightenment.

"Sure," said Curran. "I spotted him as the 'Missionary' the minute I heard the description. Of course I haven't had a chance to verify it yet; but I'll bet a thousand dollars to a plugged nickel that no such person is known to any scientist in New York."

"Then Herbert must have——?"

"Maybe not." Curran's pencil paused. "Maybe, his story that Fosdick brought the old fellow over to the museum is true. Fosdick might have been imposed on. The 'Missionary' has put it over on some of the foxiest people in the country. But there was this about old Jerome. He always had the dope on anybody of that kind checked up before he gave them a foothold. That brings us back to Herbert again—or possibly Miss O'Connor.

"Then take the other angle of it," he continued. "What about the bird who breezed into the museum last night, playing off as Herbert? Why he came, or what he wanted is a riddle to me. But it's certain that he wasn't there for any good, and that he never got his pass-key without the help of someone in the house. Whose? Herbert has an air-tight alibi to cover the evening; but that's not saying he mightn't have slipped his key to someone who jostled him in the street on his way to the Markhams, and have got it back the same way on his road home. Or, on the

other hand, Miss Secretary might have given out the impression.

"There," he thrust his pencil behind his ear, and stood up, "I've shown you some of the snarls I've got to unravel. And, believe me, that isn't the half of them. But I'm confident of one thing, Dandridge, the place to pick up the thread is right here in this house."

As he spoke, he stepped over and touched the bell; and when Pardy appeared in response, asked him to please tell Miss O'Connor that he would like to see her.

Pardy withdrew, closing the door behind him; and Curran, resuming his place at the table, sat with his chin in his hand, staring in front of him, his mouth twisting a little, but saying nothing. Taking my cue from him, I also made no comment, and we sat in silence until Miss Mouse slipped swiftly into the room.

Curran rose as swiftly.

"Will you sit there?" He pointed to a chair opposite him where the light would fall strongly on her face, and smiled at her ingratiatingly. "Miss O'Connor, I am going to be quite frank with you. This robbery couldn't have been put across without aid from inside. Now I want your help. Is there

anyone in the house that you have reason to suspect?"

Upright and prim in her straight chair, her toes barely touching the floor, Miss Mouse looked back at him without a word.

"You don't wish to commit yourself?" Curran's voice was soothing as a lullaby. "I'll put it another way. How do you feel about Mrs. Hays?"

"I think," she said concisely, "that if you knew Mrs. Hays, you would not name her in this connection."

"That leaves the curator. I've learned to believe in feminine intuitions, Miss O'Connor. Do you feel the same confidence in Mr. Herbert that you do in Mrs. Hays?"

"No," calmly; "I do not."

"Why?"

"Call it feminine intuition, if you wish." She closed her thin-lipped, little mouth.

"How long have you known him?" Curran took another tack.

"Only since I have been in this house. About a year and a half."

"By the way, how did you secure your position with Mr. Fosdick?"

"I came over from England as a secretary for

Mr. R. J. Cruden of Montreal, a friend of Mr. Fosdick's. Mr. Cruden's health began to fail soon afterward, and he started on a journey around the world. Knowing Mr. Fosdick was in need of a competent secretary, he suggested me to him, and Mr. Fosdick engaged me."

"I see." Curran was busy over his squares and cubes and triangles again. "But let us get back to Herbert. Miss O'Connor, I may be wrong, but you don't strike me as the sort of a woman with whom feminine intuition would weigh very heavily. I believe that in most instances you would discount it in favor of a considered judgment. It would help us a lot, if you would tell me the real grounds for your doubts of Mr. Herbert."

Miss Mouse showed that she was not to be hurried into making any admissions. She took her time.

"Before I answer that question," she said at last, "I would like to make a statement. My life has not been an easy one. I have had many difficulties. I began to earn my living when I was seventeen, quite a time ago," with a faint smile. "There were obstacles that seemed insurmountable."

It was patent that she had been choosing her words with care, but now she began to speak more freely.



"Everything changed, when I came to Mr. Fosdick. He had been long withdrawn from active business, and the work was very light. He had one of the most acute brains I have ever encountered, and my association with him was very stimulating. I was surrounded with ease and comfort; many pleasures and privileges were accorded me to which I was totally unaccustomed. Miss Fosdick has always been more than kind to me." There was the least quiver of emotion in her low, exquisite voice. "I have said this, Mr. Inspector, that you may understand my devotion to Miss Fosdick's interests. There are no lengths to which I would not go to assist her."

That said, she became prim and concise again.

"There are at present reasons why I do not wish to give the grounds for my doubts of Mr. Herbert. Let me have a few days longer, and I think I will have some facts to lay before you, which will be worthy of your consideration."

Curran shifted abruptly.

"Ever know a Professor Quigley?" he shot the question at her.

"I did not. Nor," there was a suggestion of contempt in her tone, "do I think Mr. Fosdick ever had such an acquaintance."

"That sounds like pretty fair grounds for doubting Herbert," Curran probed. "How about some more? I'd be grateful even for a few surmises."

But again she shook her head even more decidedly than before; and when he did not press the point, started to rise.

"Just one more question, Miss O'Connor," he stayed her. "As you probably know, everyone in this house has been under surveillance since Mr. Fosdick's death. The other day, the man who was shadowing you followed you down town into a rather questionable part of the city. He's a good man, too; but you threw him off so cleverly that he lost you. Why did you do that?"

Curran amazed me. Even the most obtuse person could draw but one conclusion from his words, that the manner of Jerome Fosdick's death was under investigation. Had he any reason to believe that she knew of the circumstances attending it, or was this merely a chance shot? I was well enough acquainted with Curran's methods by this time to be sure that he did nothing impulsively, he calculated every stroke; so I watched her closely while he was speaking.

There was no change in her demure expression.

She listened to him quietly attentive, only her eyes showing a touch of amusement as he finished.

"You must lay that, Inspector," she said, "to what Mr. Fosdick in his odd idiom used to call my pawky sense of humor. On the day you refer to, I went down to Allen street to get some brass, a present for a friend who was about to be married; but I got off at the wrong subway station, I think, and lost my way. I knew the general direction in which I wanted to go, but I was not quite sure of the short cuts. In twisting and turning about, I discovered that I was being followed. You are mistaken, though, about that man; he is a very clumsy person. It was child's play to lose him, and I couldn't resist the temptation."

"Just so. Well, I merely wanted your explanation. I won't keep you any longer."

"Thank you. Good morning." She was across the room, and out of the door.

Curran drew out a fresh cigar, removed the band and cut the tip. Then he walked over to me.

"She was lying about that down-town business," he said in a low voice, with a cautious glance at the door.

"Lying in the blandest fashion," I returned with equal caution.

There were a dozen questions I wanted to ask him; but I saw that this was not the moment to put them. He was in too preoccupied a mood.

"I'll tackle the housekeeper now," he said. "Pardy," when the old fellow answered the bell, "ask Mrs. Hays if she can give us a few minutes."

Curran continued to walk up and down the floor in silence until Mrs. Hays appeared; and then he laid down his unlighted cigar and slipped into his seat beside the table, while she took the chair lately vacated by the secretary.

She was a pleasing personality in her trim, blue serge frock, with her rosy skin, her clear, direct, blue eyes, and her brown hair graying a little on the temples, and she seemed to radiate an atmosphere of wholesomeness and competency.

Curran led up to his important questions gently.

"You have every belief in the honesty of the servants, haven't you, Mrs. Hays?"

She looked a bit troubled.

"A week ago, I could have answered that unqualifiedly in the affirmative, Mr. Curran. But since Mr. Fosdick's death, two of the minor servants have left, and without consulting me, Miss Fosdick engaged others to take their place. I am

not criticizing her of course; but that sort of thing is very disorganizing. There has never been any question of my method of running the house, and for a few days I thought seriously of resigning; but second thoughts prevailed. Mine is a highly paid position, and everything else considered, a very agreeable one. Still, Mr. Curran, this robbery has occurred since those two men came into the house. I am not accusing anybody, you understand, but I felt that it is something you ought to know."

Curran looked duly impressed, and gravely jotted down the names of the two operatives he himself had placed within these walls.

"That's an important lead," he said, without even a side glance at me. "But how about the rest of the household, Mrs. Hays? You realize that, as a matter of routine, we have to put these inquiries. Miss O'Connor now? What would you say about her?"

"Miss O'Connor? Goodness me!" bridling slightly. "I suppose you'll be suspecting me next. But if you want me to vouch for her, I'll do it gladly, Mr. Curran. And I can tell you also, that Mr. Fosdick trusted her absolutely. She has been very poor, and has had many a hard knock I think, although she seldom speaks about her past; but she's

highly educated, and anyone can see that the little thing is a lady through and through. Why, she's the last person I'd ever dream of to be connected with——"

"Surely. Surely," Curran interrupted her loquacious flow. "And I suppose you feel much the same way about Mr. Herbert, eh? Oh," as he caught from her expression what her answer would be, "there's really no suspicion attached to either him or Miss O'Connor. We simply ask these questions in the regular order of investigation. I'll bear in mind, though, what you told me about those two new servants, Mrs. Hays. That's a valuable tip. Thank you very much."

I held the door open for her, and then came back to the table.

"A lot of information you got there," I said ironically.

He lighted his cigar, and blinked at me through the smoke.

"Maybe, more than you think."

"Well, I must be wonderfully dull then," I muttered. "Lord! To me, the trees are getting so thick that one can't see the forest."

Before I could ask him to explain, though, there came a knock at the door, and Pardy entering an-

nounced that Mr. Herbert would like to see me, if convenient.

Curran, in response to an interrogatory glance from me, nodded to me to say yes.

"Good," he grinned, when Pardy had vanished. "Run along, and get all you can. He has something to spill, you may be sure; and as he'll probably want to talk to you alone, you can send Ben down to me. But don't leave Herbert alone a minute until Ben gets back. By that time, you'll likely be starting for the Markhams', and I'll be looking up 'Professor Quigley'; so I won't have a chance to see you until later in the day. So long."

I found Herbert and his guardian in the little room at the head of the museum stairs, which the curator used as an office. Herbert was seated at his desk, making a pretense at typing, and Ben was tilted back in a chair near the door. I gave the latter Curran's message, and he hurried down.

"Very kind of you to come up, Mr. Dandridge. Sit down, won't you?" Herbert pushed a box of cigarettes across to me, and I noticed that his hand was shaking nervously.

To put him at his ease, I chose one and lighted it; but when he attempted to follow suit, he had to use three matches.



"Has—Has the inspector learned anything yet?" he ventured with an attempt at unconcern. "Or nō; I won't trouble you to answer. I suppose it is hardly ethical to ask such a question—in my position.

"To tell you the truth," he went on after a little pause, "I sent for you to ask some advice. I hope you won't think me intrusive; but I am completely upset over this perturbing affair—especially of course over the personal implication of that watchman's amazing story. I realize that I must be under suspicion, and I really haven't an idea what one does in such circumstances. But I assure you, Mr. Dandridge, that I spent the entire evening at the Markhams'. I was not out of their sight a single moment."

"A statement of that sort from Professor and Mrs. Markham should completely absolve you," I said, with mental reservations on the score of the "Missionary."

"Ah!" His face brightened. "That is very gratifying. I am ignorant in these matters, and, as I say, in such a chaotic state that I wondered if I had not better engage a lawyer."

"Oh, I hardly think that is necessary at this stage," I told him. This interview struck me as

truly funny. Herbert liked me as little as I did him; and yet it was to me he was turning for counsel.

"I knew I could rely on your judgment. Thank you so much for coming up. And I hope you do not think I have been intrusive."

This would never do. He was closing the interview, and I had learned nothing. Also, Ben had not yet returned, and the telephone was at Herbert's elbow.

"I am very glad I came," I said, settling back in my chair; "for it gives me an opportunity quite between ourselves to get at your ideas in regard to this somewhat puzzling affair."

I could feel as well as see the sudden, wary quickening of his interest.

"You agree with Mrs. Hays, don't you," I continued, "that the servants are not involved? Now I may be quite wrong about it, but," I studied him, "I have somehow gained the impression that you think someone else in the house might bear watching."

He leaned back, and almost visibly relaxed. That disappointed me. He had thought I was going to say something else, and was ready for it.

"You are going too fast and too far," he said. "I haven't any suspicions of anyone. As I told you, my ideas are chaotic; but to be candid, I have—put it this way—I have an inclination to agree with Mrs. Hays about the servants. That may be, because they have served me well. As for anyone else—?" He shrugged.

I wasn't going to let him stop with that.

"Forget the servants then, and let us amuse ourselves by considering Mrs. Hays, Miss Fosdick and Miss O'Connor. We'll scratch Miss Fosdick. It is a possibility that a woman may steal her own possessions under certain circumstances, but hardly under these. Too obvious a lack of motive. Mrs. Hays, not being a subtle person and this being a subtle crime, will also be scratched, tentatively. There remains Miss O'Connor, and," I added as with an afterthought, "of course, yourself."

"Miss O'Connor, eh?" he repeated. "Rather a sphinx, isn't she? But don't imagine that I think she had anything to do with this. The fact that she has always struck me as rather a mysterious quantity means nothing. The anomaly of a woman as unobtrusive as a piece of furniture, with an—er—romantic voice—a voice with the timbre of an old violin—sets one to thinking, you know. A strange, re-

pressed, little person, who—it may be vanity on my part—seems to have conceived a curious animosity toward me.”

“I suppose Mr. Fosdick knew her previous history?”

“Oh, I should fancy so,” he replied casually. “She has what I recognized at once as the nursery governess air. Not all her time was taken up with Mr. Fosdick, and she employed the rest of it rather cleverly, I should say, to ingratiate herself with the women. One can’t live in a house, and not gather a bit here and there; and you know, women of the Mrs. Hays type like to be informed of all that is going on about them. I dare say, she found the little O’Connor useful.”

“Her confidential snooper?”

“Ha! A good phrase. Perhaps a little strong; but, yes, something like that.”

There were steps on the stair, and Ben appeared in the doorway. So I left him then, and took my way down Fifth Avenue to see the Markhams.

I had not learned much, it is true. But my mind kept recurring to that old saying about when thieves fall out; for if Miss O’Connor had spattered the mud of suspicion over Herbert, he had certainly

seen to it that her skirts were not entirely free from the mire.

Also, I kept wondering what it was that he had expected me to ask him, when I missed fire at the start of our interview.

## CHAPTER X

WHEN I met Curran at two o'clock that afternoon, he struck me as somewhat distrait. He listened to my report of my visit to the Markhams, but his mind was evidently elsewhere. When I came to my conversation with Herbert, he showed more interest.

"The fellow is nervous," he said; "but he's giving nothing away. Most hopeful sign, I see, is that O'Connor and himself are set against each other."

He resorted to his pencil and paper, a sure indication that he was considering something of importance.

"Now look here, Dandridge; there's no question that last night's show is just another development of a settled plan. The robbery and the murder have to be considered together; they are linked like that." He hooked his little fingers together. "And the further we go into one, the more headway we make on the other."

"I've set all the machinery to work on the robbery," he paused to light a cigar; "and while I'm waiting for reports, I want to take up another phase of the case. I was talking to Miss Fosdick this morning, and she feels as I do that we've got to get a closer slant on this Adelbron. I've been wondering ever since I left her, just how I'm going to manage it."

The only suggestion that I could offer was that he might go to one of her séances; but Curran was contemptuous of any such feeble expedient.

Half an hour later we were still racking our brains over the question, when the telephone on his desk tinkled. It was Sara; and she told him she thought she had solved the difficulty, and wished to know how soon she could see him.

But as he was getting into his coat, Ben came in and, drawing Curran aside, talked to him in an undertone. Whatever his news, it must have been important; for Curran hung up his coat again and turned to me.

"Sorry, Dandridge; but I can't possibly leave now. We've located the 'Missionary'. Will you go up and explain to Miss Fosdick that I have been detained? Tell her that I depute you to hear anything she has to say."



I went willingly enough; but Sara rather cruelly showed her disappointment that the inspector had not come in person.

"I suppose he told you that he is very anxious to meet Adelbron without having her suspect who he is," she said, when we were seated in the library, and she had instructed Pardy to see that no one came near the door. "Well, he's going to get his wish. I've got it all settled."

I really was not greatly surprised. Sara is one of those persons who, when she actually wants a thing, wills it so strongly that she either creates the opportunity, or the opportunity accommodates itself to her desire.

The way it came about, she told me, was that an old friend of the family had forced her way in that afternoon to recite her tribulations in connection with a bazaar which some women of social prominence were getting up for charity; and Sara, with her grandfather's flair for utilizing persons and events to her own ends, had seen her opportunity and developed it as they talked.

Her visitor, a Miss Avery, was the chairman of the committee on entertainment; and the committee, as she almost tearfully explained, was running true to form.

"My dear," she said wearily—I am giving this from Sara's account of it to me—"I have served on hundreds of committees, and they are always just the same, no matter who composes them. The women are invariably eager and full of ideas at the start, but by the third meeting they get like those people in the Bible. One of them has figuratively speaking a farm she can't leave, and another has to bury her dead or something; and so they drop off like autumn leaves in a hail storm. And now here am I, standing practically alone, with the bazaar opening tomorrow night, and not half enough entertainments provided—nothing really with pull enough to drag the money from people's pockets."

"How's the fortune-telling part?" asked Sara.

"Oh, we have Suzanne DeWitt of course, reading futures from tea leaves. An awfully sloppy accomplishment, I think; and, besides, she's such an old bazaar feature that she doesn't draw any more."

"But you should have something new, something quite different," protested Sara. "Let me see." She sat for an effective moment in deep reflection. "I have it, Miss Abigail. Why don't you get that woman everyone is talking about, Madame Adelbron?"

"The very thing!" Miss Avery clasped her hands.

"But," dolefully, "she couldn't hold séances in all that noise and glare?"

"No; certainly not. But there are other stunts. Even if she only consented to be present, there are loads of people who would pay high just to talk to her."

"How clever of you!" Miss Avery was almost abject in her gratitude. "I can never be too thankful for having come to you. I shall get this Madame Adelbron, or die in the attempt. Have you any more brilliant ideas, my dear?"

She little knew of the possibilities Sara saw unfolding.

"Well," Sara again appeared to consider, "people always enjoy anything resembling a contest, and the weird or uncanny has an almost universal appeal. I don't think you can have too much of that sort of thing. So how would it do to have two fortune-telling features?"

"I know!" she pretended to recollect. "There was a wonderful girl I went to a few months ago in Philadelphia. No one had any idea who she was. She wore a black silk mask, and one had to make an appointment with her in the most roundabout way. It was harder than getting an interview with royalty. She is a crystal-gazer."

Miss Avery was sitting on the edge of her chair, fairly quivering with excitement.

"Oh, do you think you could get her? Sara, the Lord has certainly led me to you! I was so down, and now you have smoothed everything out for me miraculously. You are a whole committee in yourself, my dear. But are you sure you can get this crystal-gazer on such short notice, Sara? The bazaar opens tomorrow night, you know; and she may have other engagements."

"Don't give that another thought, Miss Abigail." Sara was hearteningly convincing. "I've told you, I'd get her for you; and I will."

It looked to me as if she had booked a pretty large order.

"But can you?" I questioned.

"Of course." I might have known that Sara would hurdle any obstacles. "She has already consented. You see, I am one of the few people who know her real identity; and as soon as Miss Avery left, I got into communication with her.

"She will be there, and so will Adelbron," brushing aside any further consideration of that phase. "The thing to do now is, decide how we can best take advantage of the situation."

Yet, in spite of this gracious inclusion of myself

as a consultant, I soon found that my province, and that of Curran also, was merely to say, "Yes, yes," to her proposals. Sara was a born executive, inheriting the Fosdick faculty for putting her plans through without a hitch; so when the night of the bazaar arrived, hurried though her preparations had been, there was nothing wanting either in arrangements or stage setting for the scene she had determined should be enacted.

The Philadelphia crystal-gazer was on hand and properly coached in the part she was to play; Curran and I had our directions; the properties were all in place. Sara's only regret, so she said, was that she herself could not be present. Both for policy's sake, and on account of her mourning, we all felt it was better she should not appear.

All bazaars look alike, I thought as I entered the big armory that evening; floating banners, bright-hued electric lights, flower-decked booths, pretty and rapacious vendors of all kinds of worthless wares. Then, through this riot of scarlet and green and yellow and blue, my eyes were drawn irresistibly to a somber booth on one side of the hall. With heavy, black, velvet curtains falling about it, and revealing nothing of the interior, it was like a shadow cast upon the brilliance of the scene, arresting the at-

tention and causing no end of comment and wonder.

Directly across from it was the tent of Madame Adelbron; for Sara had prognosticated truly when she insisted that the medium would never overlook such an opportunity. With one eye on the publicity value of her appearance, and one on the fact that by giving her services to the cause, she would ingratiate herself with women of both social and financial importance, she had agreed to show herself for an hour or two each evening during the week the bazaar was to last, and give psychic readings, limiting the number of these to fifteen each evening, and stipulating for a price of twenty-five dollars a head.

In order to give an appearance of fairness, the bazaar managers had arranged that her subjects should be chosen by lot; but of course as always special favorites were smuggled into the list, and naturally Sara had seen to it through Miss Avery that Curran should be included. I too would have liked the chance to observe the woman at her game, but it seemed too risky an experiment. Madame would unquestionably remember me, and with her shrewd cunning might suspect the trap that was being laid for her.

With Curran, however, posing as a Mr. Wilkins of Omaha, there seemed little danger on that score;

for we were gambling on his being unknown to her, and this, so far as we could judge, turned out to be the case.

She had had built for her a sort of Oriental kiosk, hung with gaudy rugs; and there on a generously proportioned throne, she sat in imperturbable, Buddha-like calm, robed in mystic purple and festooned with amulets and stones in quaint, Eastern settings.

But, according to Curran, her telepathic gifts and even her guides in the unseen failed to reveal to her either his name, residence, or occupation. It would seem, rather, that Madame relied for her results chiefly upon her no mean understanding of human nature, and her wide experience with men, women and the world.

I gathered from what he told me, that she had appraised him as a prosperous and successful railroad executive, and depending on this impression of him, had pointed out his strength and his various weaknesses.

"She wasn't bad at that," he admitted. "She sizes you up mighty close; and where she's off, she skims over it so quick that if you aren't watching, you'd never notice the slip. She told me things about myself that are true all right, but that I'll bet you could never guess."



But I told him I was far less interested in her conjectures concerning him, than in learning what he thought of her.

"She's a wicked one," he answered, with a significant shake of the head. "And she prefers to play a lone hand; one of the kind that doesn't trust anybody. Believe me, if it wasn't for that doctor, I'd say that she was the person who put that dart into Fosdick, and that she thought no more about it than you would of swatting a fly.

"Her weakness is jewels," he said thoughtfully. "Jewels, and the money to buy 'em with. She'd go to any lengths for that. See this ring." He held out his hand. "An odd thing, a blended ruby and sapphire, very curiously set. Old David Cutler gave it to me for recovering his collection. Well, she simply couldn't keep her greedy eyes off it. They glittered like a drunkard's at the sight of whiskey."

"But I don't see that all that advances us to any extent," I carped. "I could have told you practically the same thing from my impressions of her the day she called on Mr. Fosdick."

Curran gave me a sidewise glance.

"The evening isn't over yet," he reminded me. "And, besides, that wasn't all of my conversation with the lady."

He was right. The evening had not begun to be over yet. In fact, it was just nearing its peak. And moving about as I had been from group to group, stopping for a word with this or that acquaintance, I was able to gauge the mood of the crowd. Adelbron was unmistakably a big drawing card; and yet by some freak of mob psychology the crystal-gazer of the black tent was the feature everyone was talking about.

Sara, as I told her later, had missed her vocation. She should have been a theatrical producer. The way she had stage-managed her attraction to pique and provoke the public interest was an object lesson in dramatic direction.

Her masked prophetess was the sensation of the bazaar; and even before Curran had presented himself at the shrine of Adelbron, the babble concerning the black booth across the way and its mysterious occupant had trickled to the ears of the famous psychic. It was in the air, and Adelbron would hardly have been what she was, if she had not been quick to sense the varying currents of popular opinion.

Curran, on concluding his interview with her, had not failed to add his mite to her discomfort.

"Now," he said, "I guess I'll step over, and see

what this crystal-gazer they're all talking about can tell me."

There was a curl of contempt to Adelbron's lips, and an exasperated shrug of her huge shoulders.

"That funeral place! Here, where all is gay! It makes everybody solemn. It gives me to shiver to look at it. They should write over it: 'Everybody, he must die!' And the woman there with the mask. Why is that? Is her face eaten off by rats that she must hide it? Some one has thrown acid on her, I think," with an evil leer.

"And who is she?" she demanded. "She gives no name, they say. The crystal-gazers, I know; all of them. They are not ashamed of their names. Their names mean money to them. Who then is she? Have you heard, Monsieur?"

Curran shook his head.

"No one knows. She is a mystery."

"Bah!" Madame winked knowingly. "Some girl hired from the theater, I guess, to fool the people and take their money." She drew herself up in righteous scorn. "I too can read the crystal, if I want to. But I do not do such child's play. I come here for charity, because I love the poor. And I could fool too, make trickishness that the public would eat up and drink down. But no; I would

not,"—She wanted to say, "stoop," but the word would not come and as usual she substituted—"I would not bend double to do it. I r-r-reverence my gifts."

"Maybe," suggested Curran craftily, "the masked woman is one of your crystal-gazing friends, who didn't want to show her face because she knew you would be the greater attraction?"

This was a new idea to Adelbron, and in her vast egotism she caught at it as a not improbable explanation. Rivals had arisen before and made attempts to undermine her prestige by equally covert and stealthy methods.

"Hein!" She drew in her lower lip between her teeth. "It would be like that poison-spitting cat, Valerine, to make a puppet-show in a catafalque." Her thick cheeks purpled under their rouge, as her simmering anger boiled over. "Valerine, eh? I have cut her claws before. I can do it again. I will expose her here before all these people. Watch me. I can tell fraud through a thick fence."

"Shall I tell her you are coming, when I talk to her?" asked Curran rising.

"No. No. That would be imbecile. She would run like a rat." She picked up a pad at her side, and glanced at it. "Yes; I see I have only one more

reading. So go to her, go quickly; and when she gives you audience, ask her to save the next place for someone who is what you call somebody—a person of importance—that you will bring to her.”

Curran, as he finished telling me this, gave a slight start, and laid his hand on my arm.

“By Jove, she’s coming now!” he exclaimed. “Evidently she couldn’t wait for me to fetch her. Come on!” He pushed me hurriedly toward the rear of the black booth, where from behind the curtains we could both see and hear, without ourselves being seen. “This is going to be good!” he whispered. “Battling Adelbron, Heavy-weight Psychic Champion of the World, against The Masked Unknown; both members of this club. Dandridge, if you dare to sneeze while that mountain of sin is in there, I’ll throttle you.”

We had held our positions only a moment or so, when Madame, elbowing the people outside to right and left, forced her way into the tent and stood blinking in its bright illumination.

Seen from the hall, the crystal-gazer’s booth was like a blot of ink on varicolored paper; but its interior presented the exact opposite in effect. The black, velvet curtains were lined with white, and a novel system of electric lighting had been installed,

which admirably counterfeited the broad, clear light of high noon.

There was no furniture except an ebony table in the center on which rested a large crystal ball. Behind it sat the rival seeress, a woman in a gown of dull, black silk, long in the wrists and high in the throat. A close, black turban covered her hair, and her face was hidden by a black, velvet mask depending from it and concealing her mouth and chin.

I saw Adelbron glance quickly at her hands. Hands are very identifying. But the crystal-gazer wore white gloves.

Madame sat down, her eyes playing over that shrouded figure.

"I see," said her opponent in a low, husky voice, "that you are well protected against enemies both in the seen and unseen."

Adelbron looked down at her amulets.

"I have need," she said curtly and ominously. "Go ahead."

The woman took the crystal ball between her gloved hands, and gazed steadily into it.

"Clouds," she said at last. "Storm clouds. Ah, it is getting clearer. I see glimpses of many lands, and you coming and going. You have travelled far,

Madame Adelbron. You see, I know you, although you do not know me."

Madame's lifted lip showed her yellow teeth in an ugly smile. The crystal-gazer, if she saw it, ignored it.

"It is pictured here that your life has been one of frequent change and many adventures. Danger has often threatened you, and you have been hunted. More than once, you have had to hide for months at a time."

I was holding my breath waiting for a swift outburst of anger and denunciation from the excitable foreigner, but none came.

"You should know." Her voice was scornfully amused. "I guess you hide, yourself, more than once. I make you hide. Pst! I raise my finger, and you run to your hole."

"Fog again," the reader's voice ran on. "Clouds. Clouds. You draw thick veils about yourself, Madame. There are things you would not want the world to know."

Madame's chair creaked, as if she had shifted her weight.

"You watch where you step—Valerine!" Her tone was thick with warning.

"I see you in a room." The crystal-gazer paid



no more heed than if the other had not spoken. "The windows look out on a New York street. You are bending over a table, touching something very small, a sliver of wood. You wear gloves."

There was no answer to this, only the sound of Madame's heavy breathing.

"Fog again," the relentless voice went on. "Ah, I see another room, a bedroom. There is a fire burning in a grate. You place something in the flames. A portrait—" The masked woman evidently saw from Madame's expression that she had made a slip. "No; not a portrait. But something painted." She stopped with that.

"Clouds. Clouds," she murmured. "Ah, Madame Adelbron, you are wrapping those thick veils about you, trying hard to hide. But it will not avail you this time. The light breaks through, in spite of you. In it, I see a scarred face. Your Nemesis. Always pursuing you. So!" The crystal-gazer's voice rang out full and vibrant. "The clouds sweep away. I see a court room with you in the prisoner's dock. I see the jury returning their verdict. Guilty. I see the judge. He puts on a black cap. I see you led away to your cell. I see——"

But Madame's chair overturned with a crash, as she sprang to her feet.

"You see nothing!" she burst out. "Who are you to make such talk? If you are not Valerine, hired by my enemies, you are liar and *canaille*. I show you!"

Her pudgy, beringed hands were fumbling at her bosom. One of them clutched something, and I saw a flash of steel.

But Curran, reaching through the curtains, caught the crystal-gazer by the arm, and drew her swiftly back to where we stood. At the same moment, he jerked a cord, and the heavy curtains at the front of the booth swung back to expose the interior. Madame was in full view of the crowd outside; and the knowledge that she was before an audience restored her emotional balance as nothing else could have done.

Her hand swept swiftly up to her bosom again, and came away empty. She gulped once or twice, took a second or two to steady herself, and then with a fair assumption of her ordinary manner took a majestic departure.

Curran, the masked woman and myself slipped quickly through the hangings and out at the back of the booth to one of the exits. We hurried along a corridor, and down a flight of steps to the street, where a limousine stood waiting at the curb.

"Let's hope we get away before she has some one

trailing us," said the inspector, looking back out of the window as we whirled away. "I guess we're safe, though," as we rounded a corner.

The crystal-gazer pulled off her gloves and hat, and removed her mask. It was Sara!

"Why," I asked, unable in my surprise quite to conceal my hurt at being denied her confidence, "was I alone kept in the dark? Am I so poor or treacherous a conspirator?"

"Well, I only knew it myself after I had got to the bazaar," said Curran, "or you can bet your life, I'd have found some way to put a stop to it."

"And I wanted to tell you," Sara added softly. "Only Mr. Curran thought——"

"That this was one occasion where your nerves were not to be trusted," he finished drily.

I sat back without a word. My aunt's Sunday bonnet! Was I wearing my heart on my sleeve so conspicuously as all that?

And nerves! I jumped out of my sleep a dozen times that night, as my mind reverted to that closing scene in the booth and the glance of deadly malignancy that Adelbron had shot at Sara—a glance even more deadly and malignant than the one she had bestowed on old Jerome in the library.

A woman who would stop at nothing!

## CHAPTER XI

My troubled night ended, and morning came. But it brought me no relief from anxiety. Sara's reckless escapade of the evening before frightened me. Adelbron, alarmed and revengeful, would never rest until she learned the identity of the woman who had so gallingly baited her. And her cunning might accomplish it. Materials had been bought for the booth, decorators and electricians employed; there were a dozen sources of information that might point a shrewd inquirer to Sara. Miss Avery more than likely had chattered. Some prying subordinate at the bazaar might have gathered a hint.

The more I dwelt upon the possibilities, the deeper grew my disquietude, the more imminent and menacing seemed the danger. The recollection of Curran's urgency in advising me to get Sara away from New York did not serve to lessen my uneasiness.

Leaving my breakfast half finished, I called him up to communicate my misgivings and ask him what measures he was taking to ensure her safety.

He assured me that he was giving her every possible protection.

"The President of the United States isn't any more closely guarded," he said. "My two men in the house are instructed to see that no one gets near her about whom there is the slightest question, and she doesn't make a move outside without having four or five of us right around her.

"But," he added ominously, "all the precautions in the world won't help, if she herself persists in taking such chances. The luck broke with her last night, yes; but another time it might be different. Trouble is, you never can guess what she's going to do."

That was it; you never could guess what she was going to do. For one fervent moment I wished, as I hung up the telephone, that this was a story I was reading and not living. Then I would be able to follow the dotted line of the author's explanations, and Sara with all her complex motivation would be revealed to me.

Fate—forces stronger than myself—had whirled me along in the wake of the dark star, and its radiance had blotted out all the other stars in the sky for me. Yet that same radiance dazzled and confused me.

I had given up the futile struggle to exclude her from my thoughts. It was far more entrancing to be haunted by her, than to fight against her spell. Non-resistant, I opened the doors of my heart and imagination wide, and welcomed her.

Her cool eyes as light on steel looked into mine; her red, passionate mouth smiled at me; her voice, with the color of sherry in the sun one moment, and decisive as a saber stroke the next, rang in my ears. Her moods! I could watch with a rising pulse that vital energy which found its outlet in sheer daring and never quailed at the ultimate hazard; but I had no will to withstand her soft appeal.

Her grandfather may have been able to chart the course of her wayward will; but no one else. And I even less than others. To me she was always mystifying, always an enigma. Perhaps, realizing how muddled were my wits where she was concerned, she took a perverse delight in bewildering me. When even Curran recognized the nature of my feeling toward her, Sara herself must long ago have divined it—perhaps, the first time we met, on New Year's eve.

So, with the good Lord alone knowing what fresh audacity she might be up to, and a keen prescience

of the danger she was inviting, the thought of her lay heavy on my heart that morning, overshadowing all other considerations.

I had to be in surrogate's court until after twelve; but I must have argued the motions I had up with some subconscious intelligence, for my conscious mind was wholly engrossed with the problem of Sara. And free finally to leave the court room, I hurried at once to the office, framing a pretext on the way that would permit me to call her up, if only to hear the sound of her voice.

But when I started to give the number, the telephone girl interrupted to tell me that Mr. Atchison's office was on the wire, and wanted to speak to me.

Atchison's office? Dismay gripped me. A communication from that source could be concerned only with the Adelbron claim against Sara Fosdick. What part of the sky was about to fall now?

"Mr. Dandridge? This is Mr. Atchison's secretary speaking. I have tried to get in touch with you several times this morning. Mr. Atchison is attending a picture sale, and so could not call you himself; but he instructed me to ask you if you will forgive the short notice, and dine with him in his apartment at half after seven this evening."

I succeeded in keeping the amazement out of my



voice, and after a moment's hesitation accepted. The secretary thanked me civilly, and we hung up. Then I sat staring at the instrument, as though I expected it to find a voice and explain the riddle.

Atchison and I had never met, although whenever he was trying a case, I always made it a point, if possible, to be in court. It was infinitely more diverting to me than the theater. I had often envied actors looking on at a play; they saw so many things that escaped me—the way effects were secured, a thousand *nuances*. But, being a brother of the law, I could appreciate Atchison's whole bag of tricks. He was the Houdini of the bar, a magician whose resourcefulness and technique were unrivalled.

And now here was the famous—or infamous, if you choose—Atchison tossing a dinner invitation to an obscure member of the profession. A field marshal welcoming a mere corporal to his table! And why? There was no reason that I could think of, unless it was that I had somehow become a magnet for all the adventures there were in the world. Having thoughtlessly accepted one, all the other bizarre happenings, not already dated up, came flocking to me.

Still that wasn't a wholly satisfactory explanation;

so I put on my hat, telephoned Curran, and a few minutes later met him for luncheon.

Curran, always methodical, greeted me casually and then busied himself with the menu card, studying it as thoughtfully as if he were a gourmet composing a symphonic banquet. Finally he ordered ham and eggs. But it was not until our food was set before us and the waiter had departed, that he consented to put his mind on my reasons for seeing him.

"Well?" he said, with one of those straight, sharp glances of his.

I told him.

He put a bit of ham in his mouth, his jaws working slowly.

"I don't like it—at all," he said, and then devoted himself to his meal in silence. He did not speak again, until he had pushed his plate aside, and lighting a cigar, began decorating the menu card with his polygons.

"Atchison has those letters," he muttered ruminatively. "That's the answer, for a bet. But how did he get them? As I told you, we've rounded up the 'Missionary'; boys brought him in last night, and I've had a session with him this morning. He's got the usual alibi of course, but it isn't any too

strong. You see, the old fox had a bit of hard luck; he ran, smack, into Detective Herlihy not two blocks away from the Fosdick house."

"But that practically stamps him as 'Professor Quigley'," I exclaimed. "Have you given Herbert a chance to identify him yet?"

"I have not," he said. "I'm not tipping off to Herbert that we have the 'Missionary', until I know better where to place him. I want first to see what I can get out of the 'Missionary'.

"Anyhow,"—he twisted his cigar over to the other corner of his mouth—"that's not the point I'm driving at. This unexpected run-in with Herlihy naturally made the 'Missionary' watch his step. He couldn't afford to risk a funny move. As a matter of fact, he maneuvered Herlihy into accompanying him to Gotham Hospital, where under the plea of having a pain in his chest he was admitted to one of the wards, and put to bed. And he didn't stir out of it, nor have any visitors, so the hospital attendants say, until we took him away last night.

"How then," he frowned, "could he have got the letters to Atchison? He couldn't; meeting up with Herlihy so quick, he didn't have a chance. The only way I can figure it, the 'Missionary' was simply

employed to open the safe; someone else was on hand to get the letters, and pass them on."

"Herbert." I nodded.

"But Herbert's time is pretty well accounted for," he reminded me. "He was picked up the minute he left the house, and followed to the Markhams'. No; it begins now to look more as if O'Connor was the one. That is," he qualified, "if Atchison really has the letters. And, maybe, we're taking too much for granted on that score. Maybe, it's something else he wants to talk to you about, some other case you're in?"

"I don't think so. We're in different lines entirely."

"Well, it's no use speculating until we have more to reckon on. You're going, aren't you?"

"Yes," dubiously; "unless——"

"Oh, go by all means," he urged. "And if anything is staged, let me know first thing in the morning."

He had told me already that he thought I might rest easy in regard to Sara so far as that day was concerned, as she was entertaining a great-aunt who had come down from Connecticut to see her, and would be hardly likely to leave the house.

So as we had nothing further to discuss, we sepa-

rated; and I went back to the office to give the rest of the afternoon to an elderly client who wanted to be relieved of a hobble he had got into, but couldn't be induced to tell the truth.

My appointment was temporarily out of my mind; but curiosity took possession of me again when I went home to dress, and was still stronger by the time I reached Atchison's apartment.

I was to learn later, when I knew Atchison and his ways better, what a signal honor had been conferred on me. He usually entertained at one of his clubs or in a restaurant, especially when he was prepared to discuss a legal or business matter.

I knew that he was a collector of beautiful things, and in my naïve ignorance of the man supposed that his home would have much the same museum effect as Jerome Fosdick's. Nothing could have been further from the fact. Here, there were no crashing chords, nothing that stood out; everything was blended and harmonious. You were insinuated almost without knowing it into an atmosphere of restfulness and penetrating charm.

Atchison came in at once. Having studied him only in the court room, I soon discovered that I had formed a very inadequate idea of the range of his talents. As a great actor, he had a different rôle

for every occasion; and although since then I have seen him cast himself for many parts, I have always preferred the one he played that evening within his own four walls. It was certainly most winning and disarming.

His pose—if it was one—was that of an unaffected, delightful man of the world, with a genuine gift for *cameraderie* and a true sense of humor: a host who took his duties so easily, that the guest was only aware that everything contributed to his ease and pleasure.

The dinner! Let me not pass too lightly over that. Yet I am afraid I was not quite up to it—too crude and unsophisticated to give it proper appreciation.

During the course of it there was not a word spoken, a suggestion thrown out, that he had a deeper reason for inviting me than the mere desire for my companionship.

A low suspicion came to me later that his secretary had checked up on my professional career, for Atchison showed an astonishing knowledge of my modest achievements. He complimented me on the handling of a certain will contest, and said just enough to make it all sound delightfully sincere and spontaneous to my flattered ears.

But it was not until coffee and some rare, old

brandy were served in the library, and we had lighted our after-dinner cigarettes, that the nigger peeped from the woodpile.

Atchison lounged in an easy chair, stroking the great Persian chinchilla cat on his knees as he talked. He finished a sentence, and then ran his hand over his thick, iron-gray hair with a regretful sigh.

"Too bad," he said. "Too bad!

"Dandridge, for an hour and a half you have so deadened the wheels of the everlasting grind, that I was able to forget the beastly treadmill in the background. But my Puritan conscience is again alert to it. I hear the roll and whirr of the machinery again, reminding me to ask you if you know that this European psychic, Madame Adelbron, has retained me to help her recover certain jewels and moneys which she claims your client, Miss Sara Fosdick, is illegally withholding from her."

He frowned at the fire.

"I wish you would tell Miss Fosdick that it is with the greatest reluctance I took the case; but,"—in humorous self-deprecation—"Madame Adelbron is a persistent and tempestuous lady. And, let me confess the worst, she offered me a very large retainer; and I was weak, my dear Dandridge, weak.



The Venable sale dancing before my eyes sapped my powers of resistance. There is a tavern table in that collection, and a—but I will say no more. Never take up a fad, my boy, thinking it will be a harmless recreation, an amusing diversion for your idle hours. It grows like the jinn of the bottle until it becomes the most pitiless of tyrants, and you find yourself before you know it, the mere slave of its whims.

“Of course,” with one of his mellow laughs, “I might suggest that unless I had accepted Madame Adelbron’s retainer, the case might fall into less scrupulous hands; but I cannot beguile either you or Miss Fosdick into believing that. No; I shall have to confess that I yielded to my besetting sin. This collecting lust is worse than drink, Dandridge. When the craving comes over me to possess some rare piece of furniture or glass, a picture or vase, I invariably fall. My will power is atrophied.”

The sword was descending. I watched it lower inch by inch. Curran was right; he had the letters.

“I’ve thought about the case a good deal,” he continued; “and the deeper I go into it, the stronger is my conviction that Miss Fosdick would be wise to settle the matter out of court.”

I thanked Providence for his volubility. It had given me time to pull myself together.

"Yes?" I murmured, sinking lower into my chair and lazily watching the smoke spirals of my cigarette, although there was not a lazy nerve in my body. "Well, between ourselves, I think that Miss Fosdick would probably prefer to avoid the publicity."

"Exactly," Atchison agreed. "Now old Jerome wouldn't have cared how much of his dirty linen was washed in public. He was used to seeing it hung on the line and flapping in the face of the passerby. But the granddaughter's lingerie is a different matter. If Miss Sara were another type of girl, the suit would not make the sensation it undoubtedly will. But her news value is recognized. She is very noticeable, very individual, and given to doing as she pleases. And what she pleases to do is frequently rather spectacular. Madame Adelbron is also a well-known and picturesque character. The newspapers will make the most of it. If the case comes to trial, the front page will give it plenty of space."

He paused, allowing time for this to sink in; and then shook his head, as if in disparagement of his own too human impulses.

"You're young, and therefore a little hard, Dandridge; and I suppose you'll look on me as a sentimental, old fool. But I've seen so much, the cruelties we obstinately impose on ourselves and others; and, speaking as a friend, and quite outside of any interest in my client, I would, if I were Miss Sara, pay double what this woman asks, to hush the thing up. For, whichever way things go, there is a good deal more to be considered than the mere winning or losing of the case. At present, no one takes the slightest interest in the late Allan Fosdick's late wife; but let the scandal break, and Sara Fosdick's mother becomes a living personality. She rises from her forgotten grave, an obscure Spanish dancer, the companion of criminals, herself a proven thief. Miss Fosdick must face that fact."

"I have no doubt that she will consider all you say," I replied. "But on the other hand, a woman of her wealth must be prepared to have many ingenious confidence and blackmailing schemes tried on her."

He gave me a penetrating glance from his steel-gray eyes, and pursed up his lips.

"Madame Adelbron has a fairly strong case. To tell the truth, I haven't much doubt that she is more or less of an adventuress. But discounting that

rather patent fact, she *was* in South America at the time she claims, she *was* a friend of Mrs. Allan Fosdick's, she *has* a receipt for jewels and moneys in what she claims to be Mrs. Allan Fosdick's handwriting. Now Miss Sara will have to produce specimens of that handwriting, and if in the opinion of experts, the document Adelbron holds is genuine, then she wins hands down. I took that receipt, by the way, to one of the cleverest forgers in the country, now in Sing Sing, a man who is an authority on inks and paper. He says that both are of South American manufacture, and at least twenty years old."

"Did you consult any other experts?" I asked. "I shall naturally want the receipt examined, and I don't want to employ the same men."

"Reed and Walters have both passed on it for me, and incidentally both agreed with the forger. It is in my office. Your men may see it at any time they please."

"Thanks," I said. "I will attend to it tomorrow."

He dropped the subject then, and began to talk about a murder trial in which he was counsel for the defense, bringing up a nice legal point which we wrangled over amicably, until with a belated realization that I was staying too long, I said good night.

Atchison the magnificent had given me an Epicurean dinner, and at the same time had not omitted to supply me with food for thought—with a Borgian drop of poison in it. But the poison to me was an irritant, not a narcotic, and it stirred my brain to greater activity. After leaving him, I found myself with that lucidity of mind that often comes to one around midnight; and certain things struck me as significant.

He had made the first move, and had led trumps. It must have been because he was in doubt. If the Adelbron claim was as invulnerable as he pretended, if there was nothing for Sara to do but compromise—which was of course an Atchisonian euphuism for paying through the nose—then why the effort to impress me with the strength of his case?

The stage setting! The suave and intimate atmosphere of his home! These had been used to enhance the power of his personality. And then, when he had given the spell time to work, and I was in a sufficiently susceptible mood, he had suggested settlement. He had even, while using the language of diplomacy, resorted to threats. Was it not then reasonable to suppose that somewhere in his chain of evidence there must be one or two pretty weak links?

I may have been more optimistic than the circumstances warranted; but this optimism helped keep up my *morale*, which was an important thing for any lawyer to consider who had Atchison as his opponent.

The taxicab stopped at my door. My foot was on the first step of the stairs leading to my walk-up apartment, when I suddenly remembered that I was out of cigarettes, and turned back to go to the corner and get some. I supplied my needs, and was coming out of the shop, when some one hailed me.

"Hey, Tony!"

It was Graham Smith. I hadn't seen him since the afternoon that Mr. Fosdick had been brought home, and he had pestered me with inconvenient questions. Now, as I caught his eye, I quailed. I knew that expression from college days. Solemn, and yet with a sort of relish in it—the look the cat wears, when it sees a canary within tempting reach. What was he after, I wondered. Had he heard any rumors?

"Come on with me, and have a bite of supper."

"It's late." I sagged away from him, and went through the business of looking at my watch. "There's a Pike's Peak of work before me, and nine

o'clock in the morning is nine o'clock in the morning."

"Come on," he said inflexibly, tucking his arm in mine.

One might as well try to resist an officer with a warrant. It was a simple case. If I didn't go with Graham, Graham would go with me, forage through my ice-box, cook himself what he wished, and make a night of it. It was impossible to throw him off; he knew every trick of his trade. Better to go along with a show of willingness, and so avoid arousing his suspicions that there was something to be concealed.

Whatever he wished to see me about was not dragged into the open at once. He had just unearthed some new evidence in the most recent nine days' wonder, and he was pulsing with pride and bursting with loquacity as he went into the details with me over his steak and coffee.

I had listened patiently, with a growing hope that this was his sole reason for desiring my society; and now as he drained the last drop from his coffee-cup, I began to edge from my chair. But just then he turned his owlish eyes on me, and asked a question that seated me firm as a rock.



"You're winding up the Fosdick estate, aren't you?"

"Pro tem," I said as carelessly as I could. "Plummer is one of the executors. Why?"

"Why?" he repeated, with an expressive sniff. "Well, you or somebody else in authority ought to put a bridle on that girl, Sara, and drag her up standing. Where do you think I saw her the other night, and her grandfather hardly cold in his grave?" He made jabs at me with his fork. "At a cheap, down-town restaurant. Oh, respectable enough. But I tell you, I could hardly believe my eyes. There she was with—" He paused to give the full dramatic effect to his announcement. "Oh, boy! With no one else, but Lord Harry!"

"Lord Harry who?" I asked stupidly.

Smith put down his fork, and looked at me with the contempt newspaper people always feel for those ignorant of any of the innumerable characters they have card-indexed in their journalistic memories.

"For the love of Pete!" he said impatiently. "Where do you live anyway? Lord Harry, my son, occupies about the same position in the underworld that Sara Fosdick does in the upper. Lord Harry has an international reputation. He walks in darkness, even his especial line is not known; and he

intrigues the police more than any of his kind. And that girl let herself be seen with him! Late, too! It was after midnight. She deserves a good, old-fashioned session with the back of a hair-brush, you know. Her gall! She thinks she can get away with anything. But she's riding for a fall this time. She can't play around with Lord Harry, and not pay the piper. He'll trim her, until he makes old Jerome's pile of securities look like a crumpled cigar-store coupon."

Staggered, appalled as I was, the legal training still functioned.

"Blah!" I sneered. "You'd been having some of that Greenwich Village hooch, and saw things. You newspaper birds always amaze me. You're so utterly cynical, and yet at the same time so credulous. You believe everything, and nothing."

"Huh? I believe this, because I know. The good old lamps don't deceive me. They're trained not to."

"What night was it, you thought you saw them?"

"Why—let me see? Sure. It was night before last. I know, because——"

I didn't hear the rest. Thunder was crashing in my ears. Night before last was the date of the robbery.

"Well, I'm not her guardian." I managed to say it naturally, although my tongue felt thick and my mouth was dry. "But look here, Graham; I want you to promise me something. Don't mention what you've just told me to anyone else, will you, unless you speak to me first?"

Graham's full, glassy eyes were on me. I knew that he was wondering, drawing conclusions, tucking away our conversation for future reference.

"Oh, sure," he said, as he picked up the check and paid his bill. "Sure, if you feel that way about it."

## CHAPTER XII

BED held no rest for me that night, and so I did not seek it, but threw myself instead into a chair in my small book-lined sitting room, and tried to think things out. A futile effort. I felt as if I were tossing on a tempest driven sea of doubt, pelted with the hail of question marks.

Atchison and Adelbron? Miss Mouse and Herbert? Jerome Fosdick's strange end, and the stolen letters and jewels? And now Sara and Lord Harry sitting together over a table in a down-town restaurant at midnight—the evening of the robbery? It was beyond belief, and yet I knew that Graham Smith was neither inventive nor imaginative; he merely reported what his eyes saw.

One thing gradually became clear to me. Sara had not met that man at that place except with some definite purpose in view. Her one impelling desire was to discover the person or persons who were responsible for her grandfather's death, and she had

certainly not been actuated by an idle whim for a more picturesque and daring adventure than those within her reach.

I remembered the day she had seen me in that artificial, black and gold drawing room; her abstraction, her scorn of the slowness of Curran's methods. I had feared at the time that her mind was on some plan that she was concocting without benefit of either the Inspector or myself, and now I was sure of it. I recalled her impatience over the delay in getting those letters into our hands. Had she been reckless enough to call in a professional safe-breaker to aid her in securing them?

A plausible theory; the only flaw in it being that it didn't fit the facts. For Sara did not have the letters; and after my recent interview with Atchison, there was every reason to believe that they were in his possession.

And buttressing this belief was Curran's statement that the man masquerading as Herbert could not have opened the safe and given it that painstaking and methodical search, of which there was every evidence, in the time he was in the house; and he also declared positively that there was no shadow of doubt that it was the work of the "Missionary".

I sat up shivering, and began to walk about the

room to restore my circulation. The radiators were cold, and there was the rattle of milk wagons in the street below. The dim, gray light at the windows told me that even now a more or less rosy morn was standing tip toe on the Woolworth building.

Then, like Artemus Ward's prisoner, who after languishing for thirty years in a dungeon, conceived one day a bright idea, and climbed to freedom through the window, I suddenly perceived that the one way out of my perplexities was to go to Sara, tell her what I had heard and ask for an explanation.

She might maintain a baffling silence. On the other hand she might answer me with perfect candor. No one need ever waste time in speculating what Sara would or would not do. But I had decided on my own course, and that settled, I turned in, slept a few hours, and after a late breakfast, started for the Fosdick house.

On the way, though, I stopped in at Curran's office to make some inquiries about Lord Harry.

"Great Scott!" he cried, "don't tell me he's in this Fosdick case. That will be the last straw."

"I'm not telling you anything of the kind." I did not intend to take Curran into my confidence

until I knew something more definite than I did at present.

"Then why are you so interested in him?" Never were blue eyes more acute than the Inspector's at this moment.

"My dear Curran," I said patiently, "our firm has a few other matters to look after beside the Fosdick case."

I don't know whether he accepted this or not. He gave himself a moment to digest it anyway, as he relighted his cigar. Then with his elbows on the table, he began to speak, making a little jab at me with his forefinger to emphasize each word.

"If any of your clients is involved with Lord Harry in any way, you'd better advise him to park all his worldly goods, including the gold fillings in his teeth, in the nearest safety deposit vault. When Lord Harry goes to a hen roost, he doesn't leave even a nest egg."

"What type is he? Rough customer? Gunman?"

"He's a gentleman, my boy, fitted to shine in any circle, even the most exclusive. And what he can get away with! He's never been nipped either, except once in England, when a pal squealed on him. Even then he got off with three years which is light for burglary over there."



"Burglary!" I pretended surprise. "I gathered from what you have just been saying that he must be a super confidence man or a card specialist on one of the big liners, something of that sort."

"Lord Harry," Curran replied, "is an expert in many lines. He has no specialty; he plays right through the orchestra from first violin to kettle-drum, and can double in brass if necessary."

"An old timer?" I asked.

"In experience, yes. In years, he can't be much over thirty, and he looks younger. Tell your client from me to settle with him as quickly as possible, and end all dealings. He is a very dangerous person."

"Thanks, I will," I said, and leaving it at that, turned the subject back to the Fosdick affair; but he had no fresh information to give me, and I went on up town, in none too happy a frame of mind.

Pardy welcomed me with dignified curiosity, which he tried to conceal, and which was due, no doubt, to the earliness of my call, and came back presently to say that Miss Fosdick would see me in her sitting room.

The door of it stood open, and Sara, seeing me, came down the hall with a little rush to meet me.

"You know something?" she cried, her eyes searching my face. "It's bad news too. Tell me quickly."

"No. I don't know anything new, and neither does Curran. I just left him. I came to find out something."

"Oh! From me, who knows so little? Sit down, there, before the fire. It is cold this morning. Well," seating herself opposite me, "the witness is in the chair, and will, presumably,"—there was a tantalizing gleam in her gray eyes,—“speak the truth.”

She was ready for me. I saw that it was no use to come to the point bluntly. I would have to approach the subject by indirection.

"I stopped in to see Curran this morning, as I told you, and he urged me, as he does constantly, to use my non-existent influence with you to get you to go away from New York, and leave this investigation in the hands of those who make a business of such things."

I flattered myself that this statement was plausible, also true, and rather neatly accounted for my down expression which had led her to infer that I brought bad news.

"To—heaven with Mr. Curran," she said. "And

did you leave a perfectly good law practice to come rushing up here, just to tell me that?"

"No," I said, "I knew better. My mission is a more selfish one. Sara Fosdick, I want you to stop disturbing my sleep. Every time I start in on my normal eight hours of dreamless repose, you come along and explode a bomb-shell under my windows, which, quite aside from the nervous shock of it, keeps me awake for hours, puzzling to find out what it's all about."

There was a flash of comprehension in her eyes, then her lids fell.

"You are mistaking me for some other lady. I wouldn't know how to explode a bomb-shell if I had one."

Something in the way her lashes lay on her cheek, the lazy tilt of her head against the back of her chair annoyed me. I wasn't going to be drawn into a battle of wits with her.

"You're too modest," I said brusquely. "As a bomb thrower, you hold the championship." And without any more preamble, I told her of my conversation with Graham Smith.

"You may have thought you had an excellent reason for this action," I went on when I had finished with Graham's disclosures, "but by taking

such risks, and mixing yourself up with such persons, you are making double work for Curran. He has his hands full enough as it is, without having to take valuable time to devise new measures for your protection."

"You really ought to go on the Chautauqua Circuit," she said admiringly. "As a lecturer, you'd make a tremendous hit."

She was doing her best to make me feel that I had put myself in a ridiculous position by trying to play the heavy guardian. She let this sink in, and then continued;

"On the night you speak of, I was much better protected than I would have been, with the Inspector's clumsy body-guard around."

"That's as you look at it," I said, still holding on to my temper with a firm grip; "but what about me? I am your lawyer, engaged by yourself, and yet without a word to me, you suddenly ally yourself, for reasons you will not explain, with one of the most subtle and dangerous crooks in the world, and I am left to hear of it from an outsider. It isn't fair, Miss Fosdick. It puts me in a position which I don't choose to hold. I cannot work with you wholeheartedly, unless I have your confidence, and since you withhold that, the only course left me,

is to resign and suggest that you engage another attorney."

"But I won't take your resignation," stormily. I felt a glow of satisfaction; I had really startled her. She had entirely dropped that superior air of holding the winning hand, no matter what cards I might play. "I won't engage another lawyer; I want you."

She was appealing now; and when Sara appealed, no man could resist her.

"Ah, this won't do! Why, Mr. Dandridge, you and I are on the edge of a quarrel. I never thought you'd treat me this way, when I'm only trying to help, trying my best to—. I will tell you the whole story,"— She caught herself up as if considering something— "but I can't tell it until this evening. Come here to dinner. You'll do that, won't you—for me?"

"Yes; if it's a promise that you won't keep back anything." I had the advantage now, and was willing to be generous. "But if, by this evening, you have changed your mind, I shall walk out of the house dinnerless, and—I mean it, Miss Fosdick—I shall not return."

"Oh, don't be so melodramatic with your eternal farewells!" She made me a low bow from the

waist, her hands thrown out. "You won't go dinnerless to-night."

"That's a promise?"

"Of course, it's a promise."

I saw, that like Cousin Egbert, she could be pushed just so far, and certainly no farther just then; so, making a pretense of being contented with my half-loaf, I left her. The rest of the day I put in at the office, trying as I had done the day before with Atchison's unexpected invitation, to drown my curious speculations over the impending event in a press of work.

When I returned to the house a little before half after seven, the dinner hour she had named, Sara was already in the library, but she had provided against any immediate demands on my part to hear her promised explanation; for the little secretary, primly knitting, was also present as a safeguard against intimate revelations.

I waited impatiently for some sign or suggestion from Sara that would leave us alone, but none came; and presently it began to dawn on me that we must have been sitting there chatting on indifferent subjects long past the dinner hour. Sara did not seem disturbed by the delay, but Miss Mouse, I observed, had laid aside her knitting and every moment or so

was stealing worried glances at the watch on her wrist.

It must be, I decided, that another guest was expected, and I wondered if it was Curran who was so flagrantly breaking the most rigid of social commandments.

Just then, however, Pardy appeared at the door, as I supposed, to announce dinner. Sure now of Sara's bad faith, I started to rise. But instead of speaking to her, the old butler looked at me.

"A telephone call for you, Mr. Dandridge."

I excused myself a little confusedly, and went out to the booth in the hall. It was Curran calling.

"Sorry to have to disturb you, Dandridge." I was struck by the gravity of his tone. "I rang up your apartment, and they told me where to find you. It is just as well you are there; for something has happened that Miss Fosdick should know also. Herbert has been murdered."

"What! Herbert! You can't mean it!"

"Yes; they got him about fifteen minutes ago, as he was on his way to see me. He telephoned late this afternoon to ask for an interview—to come clean, I gathered from the hints he gave me, or at least to hand over some pretty important informa-



tion. His nerve was about gone you see, and he was ready to spill what he knew and save himself as far as he could. But the other side evidently listened in, and arranged to stop him. He was killed not three blocks away from the Fosdick house, and with two of my men within a few feet of him. They saw him suddenly stagger and fall. When they picked him up, he was unconscious. Died before the ambulance got there. We are passing it off as heart disease; but they got him just as they did old man Fosdick—a poisoned dart in the side of the neck.”

I had not closed the door of the booth; and now, as I turned to come out, I saw Miss O'Connor standing there before me, her little figure frozen into immobility, her hands clasped on her breast, her eyes dilated with terror.

Sara was coming swiftly down the hall toward her, as if she had followed in haste.

“What is it?” It was Sara who spoke. “Did I understand that something has happened to Mr. Herbert?”

I nodded. “He was hurt—fatally, Curran says—a short distance from here.”

I never was more amazed in my life than at the effect of my words. Either Sara or Miss O'Connor

would have been less than human, if they had not been shocked. I was appalled myself at this tragic, new twist in the already tangled skein. But Herbert was almost certainly implicated in the recent safe-burglary, if not in the actual murder of Jerome Fosdick, and Miss O'Connor had not hesitated to throw suspicion on him. So when I saw her reel and fall heavily against Sara, I stood rooted in astonishment for a dumb and motionless instant. Then I sprang to her assistance, and lifting her, laid her down on a couch.

"Get Mrs. Hays at once," I said to Sara. "She has fainted."

Then, as I straightened up from beside the couch, I felt myself stiffening, the hair slowly rising on my head; for a man had stepped through the French window at the rear end of the dimly lighted hall, and was coming toward us. Herbert, himself—in the flesh!

"Do forgive my fire-escape entrance, as well as the lateness of the hour," he said to Sara, in a voice which was not Herbert's. "But Curran's sleuths were so thick, that I had no choice. Why——!"

He had caught sight of Miss Mouse on the couch, and he passed Sara and myself like a shadow, and knelt beside her.

"Cathleen!" he cried, lifting her. "Good God! You're not dead! Speak to me. It's Harry."

Lord Harry! I had already guessed that it must be he.

## CHAPTER XIII

MISS O'CONNOR opened her eyes, stared dazedly at the face bent over her, lifted her hand and touched the man tentatively as if to make sure that he were not a ghost, and then gave a long sigh of content.

"Harry!" she murmured weakly, "I thought you were killed," her voice broke in a sob. "Almost at the door, they said. I was sure they had mistaken you for Herbert."

He evidently thought her mind was wandering, and then his quick brain caught the significance of her words.

His eyes turned to Sara and myself.

"What does she mean?" he questioned swiftly, "Who was killed? Not Haworth—Herbert, I mean?"

"Herbert, yes," I said. "Inspector Curran just telephoned us. He was—er—taken with some sort of a seizure in the street and died instantly. Killed is not exactly the right word."

He ignored this feeble effort of mine to conceal the facts.

"So they got him too," he muttered, "just as they did Fosdick. The *Fer de Lance* again."

I realized then that the murder of Jerome Fosdick was no secret to him. Either Sara or Miss Mouse must have told him; but what was the meaning of those last, cryptic words?

But while I was still wondering about them, he, with the swiftness of movement, mental as well as physical, which was characteristic of him, had turned his attention to his sister again. I was sure she was his sister, for although there was no resemblance, they were of different types, yet there was something in the carriage of the head, the set of the eyes, as well as other indefinable signs which proclaimed the relationship.

"Don't you think you ought to go to bed, Cathleen?" he asked. "You've had a shock, and you should rest."

She had struggled up and now sat on the side of the couch looking white and limp.

"Perhaps I should," she said, "I don't want to, but I feel so weak."

While we had been talking, Pardy had summoned Mrs. Hays, and now, she came running down the

steps, and bent over Miss Mouse with many exclamations of affectionate concern; but this did not interfere with her efficient handling of the situation. Pardy, under her orders, had already lifted the little secretary, and was starting toward the stairs with her.

"Take Mr. O'Connor into the library," Sara whispered to me, "I shall be down as soon as I see that she is really all right."

Lord Harry left those outer habiliments of Herbert, his hat and coat, in the hall, and followed me into the fire bright room, quite a different person from the man who had so startled me by his sudden appearance at the end of the hall.

He had taken a cigarette from his case, lighted it, and now he stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down abstractedly into the fire, so deep in thought that I had an excellent opportunity to study him.

A strong, slender figure, a rather high-bred face, with a clean tan over the fair skin, blue eyes and light hair; a most disingenuous and attractive looking young man; but I had had another glimpse of him there in the hall when he had first heard of Herbert's death; the quick forward thrust of the jaw, the hard, wary glint in the eye, one incredibly swift

movement of the hand, all revealed the outlaw perpetually on guard.

I saw now how it was that he had been able to impersonate Herbert so well. They were of about the same build, the conformation of the lower part of their faces was similar. The most noticeable thing about Herbert was that one shoulder was perceptibly higher than the other, and he also had a slight peculiarity of gait. It was therefore not difficult for a man with a mimetic gift to counterfeited the dead curator's appearance and manner.

A number of things were becoming plain to me. Lord Harry was certainly the man who had entered the museum the night of the robbery, and had been mistaken for Herbert by the watchman on duty. Also, being Miss O'Connor's brother, it was through her that Sara had met him; but whether Sara had used him in the furtherance of her own scheme, or whether she had been cleverly persuaded by the brother and sister, I could not tell. Until I knew better just where this *de luxe* crook and his sister fitted into the general plan, I must reserve decision. Their purpose might be innocuous; I was inclined to give the sister, at least, the benefit of the doubt; but, on the other hand, it might be predatory.

Considering these possibilities, I forgot him



temporarily and looked up suddenly to find his eyes boring me, an ironically amused smile on his lips.

"But Mr. Dandridge," he answered my thoughts as if I had already uttered them, "if I had any questionable object in mind, I would hardly have come here tonight to meet you, Miss Fosdick's lawyer."

He dropped into a chair opposite me, and went on.

"Forget for a breathing spell, all the fact and fiction you have heard about me, and let me put the case before you. Miss Fosdick has a secretary who is devoted to her. That secretary is the salt of the earth, but she owns a brother who is a black sheep. Odd, but those things happen in the best regulated families, you know. Yet, even black sheep occasionally have their uses. Miss Fosdick was in a dilemma and consulted the secretary. The secretary saw how the difficulty might be overcome, by utilizing the talents of the brother; and asked his assistance.

"Now, Mr. Dandridge," he dropped his light tone, "it made no difference to him that Miss Fosdick is fair game for his kind. He was acting solely on behalf of his sister, a labor of love, you might say. We all have a code of some sort, mine—and I modestly believe that I am confessing to my only weakness—stops short of utilizing Cathleen for any

personal advantage. That safe might have been stuffed with the most tempting and easily negotiable securities, and I would have seen my hand wither before I touched one of them. Rather! Miss Fosdick is in no more danger from me than she is from you."

I was beginning to understand the success he had won in his dubious calling. That disarming manner. His sympathetic, winning personality. And his voice—it held the same rich and haunting quality that was in his sister's, only it was more persuasive. An old saying of his countrymen applied to him, if ever to anyone: he could wheedle the birds off the trees.

But this bird was determined to stick tight to his bough. I wasn't going to be lured off with any sugared crumbs of fair speech.

"Let's get this clear." I am afraid I spoke a bit stiffly. "If I understand you, Mr.——?"

"You may call me O'Connor here."

"If I understand you then, Mr. O'Connor, you admit that you broke into the safe in the museum, but claim as your justification that it was done at Miss Fosdick's request, and——"

"Right in one respect," he interrupted me pleasantly; "wrong in another. I did come here to open

the safe as a special favor for Miss Fosdick; but someone had been ahead of me. The safe had already been opened. The cupboard was bare.

"Then why did you stay so long?"

"Partly to make sure that the letters I was sent to get were not there, and partly to decide who had done the job."

"Was Miss Fosdick there with you?"

"No. I reported to her later at a down-town restaurant where we had agreed to meet."

"You were entirely alone in the museum then?"

He hesitated briefly.

"My sister was with me. She helped me search for the letters."

"And neither of you removed anything from the safe—for Miss Fosdick, of course?"

"Thank you for the saving clause," he drawled.

"Really, though, there was nothing left that interested either Miss Fosdick, my sister, or myself."

I shot my next question at him suddenly.

"Do you know Heywood Atchison, the criminal lawyer?"

There was a slight twitch in a muscle on the side of his face, that showed I had taken him by surprise; but he recovered himself immediately.

"Most people in my line do know him, or know

of him." He shrugged his shoulders. Then he abandoned his flawless ease; he leaned forward, his eyes narrowing. "Tell me one thing, Mr. Dandridge; where, the devil, does Atchison come into this?"

"Well, as Madame Adelbron's attorney, he was willing no doubt to pay a high price for those letters; and I'm as sure as one can be of anything, that he has them now."

He gave a low whistle.

"I see," softly. "And you think that I——?"

"Somebody did," I answered. "I am merely pointing out to you at present the possibility, that either you or your sister might have——"

"Hold hard there!" he interrupted. "Rather than have Cathleen brought into this, I will tell you something. That safe was robbed by an old fellow called 'The Missionary'."

"We already know that 'The Missionary' opened the safe; but we also know that he had absolutely no opportunity to get the letters to Atchison."

"Then Haworth—Herbert handed them over."

I shook my head.

"Herbert's movements are equally well known. He was shadowed every step of the way he took that night, and since then, he has of course been watched constantly."

"Strange," he muttered, "there's a missing link somewhere. And yet not so strange, after all, with Atchison pulling the strings."

He gave an impatient twitch of the shoulders.

"This is a lot more serious than I thought. I know Adelbron, the old faker, and all of her crowd. She's as devilish and cunning as a cobra. I haven't much doubt that she retired old Mr. Fosdick, or arranged for it, and he isn't the first notch on her stiletto by any means. But you can figure on her to some extent. What I mean is, that she has only so many moves at her command, and they can be reckoned in advance and guarded against. With Atchison behind her though. My word! It is like putting human intelligence into a poison gas shell. One can't guess where it will strike next. Really, I am afraid that even Miss Fosdick may be in some danger."

I didn't care to have him see how hard any suggestion of this sort hit me.

"I don't think so," I said. "In the first place, the Inspector has made every provision for her safety; and in the second place, the nature of their scheme is a guarantee of her safety. They think she will come across to avoid publicity."

"Ye-s," thoughtfully. "But Miss Fosdick has

started in to fight; trust them to know what her attitude is. And she is clever, very; and quite fearless. Trust them to know that, too. And she is determined to bring the murderer of her grandfather to book. The odds are that she will give them a run for their money. Then they will act. What if they do have to abandon the blackmail feature? They have a claim; and it would be just as good against her estate. Atchison will see to that. I tell you——”

He broke off abruptly, for just then Sara came into the room.

“Starving?” she questioned. “Well, relief is in sight. Pardy has informed me that dinner is about to be served. Your sister,” she smiled at Lord Harry, “is coming around nicely. Mrs. Hays gave her an old-fashioned dose of valerian and tucked her up in bed, and will stay with her until she drops off to sleep. I don’t wonder, though, that the poor, little thing was terrified. I was myself. The fact that you were late, and that as Herbert’s double you were probably approaching the house at just that time, was enough to set anybody’s imagination to working.”

Lord Harry hunched up one shoulder.

“All my lucky stars were out,” he said. “And

thanks be, that Curran's watchdogs forced me to a detour. Herbert was on his way to confession, I suppose?"

I was surprised at the shrewdness of his guess—if it was a guess.

"He was on his way to keep an appointment with the Inspector, when it happened," I said.

"His old game!" The corner of Lord Harry's lip lifted contemptuously. "Did he telephone to Curran? Yes! of course, he would. Poor fool! Didn't he realize that somebody would be listening in on every message that went in or out of this house? But he always lost his wits, when he got into one of his blue funks."

Sara started to say something in reply, but he silenced her with a quick gesture. He must have had the ears of a cat, for I had not heard a sound. But a second later, Pardy threw back the doors and announced the delayed dinner.

Sara rose. "I have explained you to Pardy and Mrs. Hays," she murmured to Lord Harry in an aside. "I knew they would both be eaten up with curiosity; so I told them you were Miss O'Connor's brother, and had come over from the museum where you had been discussing some art subjects with



Herbert. They know nothing yet of what has happened to him."

We followed her into the dining room; but during dinner, by a sort of tacit consent, none of us referred to the subject uppermost in our thoughts. With Pardy hovering about, we were taking no chances. This latest manifestation of unsparing malevolence had shaken us all pretty deeply; we were doubtful of everyone.

The meal, therefore, it might be assumed was a rather silent and depressing affair—the very sort of an atmosphere to create the suggestion that something was wrong. It was Lord Harry who saved the situation for us. He was so casual, so apparently at ease, that the background of tragedy receded a little; it no longer appeared so imminent and threatening. He talked a good deal in a whimsical, fascinating way, and yet he made no effort to monopolize the conversation. On the contrary, he drew Sara and myself into it so skilfully, that before we realized it, we were taking our part quite naturally and spontaneously.

After we had adjourned to the library, though, and had satisfied ourselves that no one was eavesdropping, I put the question to him that I had been

longing to ask for the last hour, phrasing it as tactfully as I could.

"I get the impression, Mr. O'Connor, from what you have said, that you know considerably more about Herbert's past life than the rest of us do. Is it going too far to ask how you came by that knowledge?"

For a moment he hesitated; then he dismissed caution with a flip of his fingers.

"The cut of the cards has made us partners," he smiled. "I don't say that I would have voluntarily chosen it so, but I have been drawn into the affair—through Cathleen, of all people!—and I suppose must accept the consequences."

His tone so far had been lightly ironical, but at once he became serious.

"I do know more about Edwin Haworth, or Herbert, as you call him, than any other living person probably. We grew up together. He was the strangest combination I ever met—what they call on the turf an in-and-outer. Born that way. He simply couldn't run straight with anybody; not even himself.

"It was a case of double personality, perhaps. That's the only way I can account for him. For long stretches, the Dr. Jekyll side of him would be

on top—a cultivated student of art in all its forms, an authority on periods, the ideal museum director. Then he would suddenly reverse, and become Mr. Hyde. Hardly that, either; for he was never a ruffian. He had the soul of a spaniel, cowardly and timid. Nothing but positive proof could ever make me believe that he had any hand in the murder of Mr. Fosdick, or even knew in advance that it was planned.”

I nodded in agreement, recalling as I did the fellow’s agitation when he intercepted me in the hall on the afternoon of old Jerome’s death.

“No,” Lord Harry continued; “you couldn’t properly call Haworth a Mr. Hyde. But you understand what I mean. He would have his sprees of crime, just as another man with the drink; but he never went in for any rough stuff. His work was always along subtle lines. Forgery was his specialty, and he was a master at it. The Lord alone knows how many pseudo art treasures he has put over on the cleverness and apparent authenticity of the documents he would get up. He liked anything that required calculation or minute attention to details.”

Sara and I exchanged quick glances. There could no longer be any question as to where Adelbron

had obtained that yellowed and time-worn list and receipt on which she based her claim.

"He could have been a great crook,"—Lord Harry spoke almost regretfully;—"perhaps even one of those master minds, that you meet so often in fiction, and never in real life. The trouble was, he invariably straddled the fence. He couldn't stand squarely on one side or the other. When he was on the Jekyll side, he was always peeping through or peering over, and thinking what fun it would be to play around in the Hyde grass plot; and the same way, when he was on the Hyde side. Just when all his nerve and backbone were needed to pull off a big *coup*, the blighter would weaken, and flop back to respectability, leaving his pals to be gathered up in the net.

"That's what he did to me." His mask dropped, showing us once more for an instant the grim, set features of the outlaw; but it was so swiftly adjusted that the next minute, gazing at that boyish, attractive face, we doubted the evidence of our eyes. "The only stretch I ever got, I earned through trusting him. Well, the score is even now," he shrugged; "he won his own finish the same way. He could have held out, and defied Curran. You really didn't have a thing on him. But his coward-

ice and his law-and-order instincts got the upper hand, and he couldn't help squealing. And this time his crowd was merciless.

"Just a rat," he muttered callously. "He had it coming to him all right. I can't pretend to any regrets, and I am quite sure that Cathleen will feel none."

"But why did your sister not expose him to Mr. Fosdick?" I asked.

"Cathleen didn't know him from Adam," he replied. "It was only after I came to New York a few weeks ago, that she, hoping I might throw some light on this mystery, described in detail every one in the house. I thought then that Herbert must be Haworth, and afterward made sure of it; but I wanted more information before I let him know that I was here and had spotted him, so I set Cathleen to watch him."

Another point on which we had been kept in the dark. I could imagine Curran's indignant comment when he learned of the circumstance.

As if the thought of him had been a sort of telepathic warning of his presence, Pardy knocked at the door and announced that Inspector Curran was calling, and would like to see both Miss Fosdick and myself if convenient.

"A visitor, eh?" Lord Harry got up without undue haste. "You will want to see him alone; what? Then, if you'll excuse me, I'll run up and say bye-bye to my sister." He looked about him for the proper exit.

Sara indicated a door on the other side of the room, and when he had vanished through it, nodded to Pardy to show Curran in.

Of course, the inspector's eye fastened at once on that third coffee-cup.

"Miss O'Connor," Sara explained blandly. "She has gone up stairs. I fancied you'd prefer to see Mr. Dandridge and myself alone."

"Right." He settled himself in the chair Lord Harry had vacated. "I want to talk over with you this new complication. Quite a jolt to us, I'd call it. Herbert was the key to the whole case; when he telephoned this afternoon, I flattered myself that I had everything in my hands. But now I am worse off than ever.

"I can hardly believe it still." He pulled perturbedly at his lower lip. "You would have said the fellow was as safe as if he were in the Tombs. Two of my best men almost at his elbow. Yet on a quiet side street, a taxicab crawls by, and he is done for."

"But taxicabs can be traced," said I.

"This has been," impatiently. "Stolen for the occasion on Thirty-fifth street about an hour before, and found abandoned on Central Park West. Not much help in that, is there. No; the only real clue we have is in the statement of a passer-by, who says that he noticed the cab moving slowly down the street just before Herbert came along. Some one was inside—a woman, he is inclined to believe, because whoever it was, was holding up a lorgnette which gleamed in the light. He took it for granted from this and the leisurely pace of the cab, that this person was looking for the number of a house. The face did not show at all, and he thinks it must have been veiled. But he got an impression that the passenger in the cab was very large and corpulent."

"Adelbron!" Sara and I exclaimed simultaneously.

"I knew you'd say so." Curran shook his head. "But the difficulty is, that Madame Adelbron at that exact moment was holding a séance in her apartment, with a group of society women present whose names are an absolute guarantee of good faith. It's another perfect alibi."



## CHAPTER XIV

STAGGERED by such a facer, Sara and I could only stare at the Inspector in silence, uncertain what to think.

"You see how it is; the breaks go steadily against us," he said at last with a touch of bitterness. "Well, it's no use crying over spilled milk, I suppose. Yet I can't help blaming myself for this latest catastrophe; for that's just what Herbert's death amounts to, so far as this case is concerned. Yes, sir; I made a fatal blunder that time."

"Oh, I think that's an exaggerated way to look at it," Sara attempted to speak consolingly. "How could you have foreseen anything of this kind?"

"I should have prevented it, Miss Fosdick. When Herbert telephoned me, I should not have waited; I should have gone to him at once. He was the link through which I expected to get to Adelbron. I knew he would come through; you can always tell when they are getting ready to talk. But now with

him gone, we're back where we started from. Worse; for there isn't a way that I can see to reach her."

But his gloom, instead of depressing Sara, stiffened her spirit.

"Nonsense!" she protested stoutly. "There is always a way. And if there isn't, like our old friend Hannibal we'll make one."

The sag did not lift from Curran's shoulders, however.

"It's Adelbron," he muttered; "I'd stake my life on it. But those alibis! How does she do it? And the boldness of her moves! The organization, it all shows!"

He looked at Sara almost appealingly.

"I suppose there's no hope of your disappearing for a while, Miss Fosdick?"

"Not the slightest," she replied. "The devil, of course, is watching out for his own. But he can't keep an eye on Adelbron all the time; and when he nods and gives us a chance, I want to be right here on the spot."

"Humph!" growled Curran. "Then let's hope he nods mighty soon." He rose to leave at that; but paused reflectively. "I don't want you to let anything I've said make you nervous, Miss Fosdick,"—

ne spoke in a more reassuring tone—"we are giving you every possible protection. I've got a strong cordon posted around the house. No one goes in or out, unless we know it."

"I'm never nervous, Inspector," she laughed. "I let you and Mr. Dandridge do the worrying. It's so much easier."

And with this flippancy, she allowed him to take his departure.

I turned swiftly, as the door closed upon him, to voice my disapproval.

"Aren't you going to tell him of Lord Harry, and what we've learned from him about Haworth and the opening of the safe?"

"Not until I have consulted Lord Harry himself. If I revealed that he is in the house at present, it might put both the Inspector and himself in an embarrassing position. Also, the Inspector in his present mood might consider it his duty to arrest me as an accessory to the burglary. Why,"—with an impudent grimace—"rush into danger unnecessarily?"

"You're going back on your own creed," I retorted. "But let me point out something else, that may not have occurred to you. You heard what Curran said about the cordon he had posted, and the difficulties of entering or leaving the house un-

questioned. How about Lord Harry then? Are you prepared to put him up as a permanent guest?"

I saw from her face that I had scored at last.

"Heavens!" she cried. "I hadn't thought of that. But,"—brightening—"why can't he go out with you? No one would think of stopping you."

"Is that so?" grimly. "Well, I'm willing to bet that by the time we reached the bottom of the steps I and your crook playmate would both be collared, hustled into a cab, and taken to Curran's office to make such explanations as we can. You forget what you have called, 'the Inspector's present mood'."

Before she could find an answer to this, there was a light tap at the door, and Lord Harry walked in, ready for the street, not bothering to remove his hat in Sara's presence. *His* hat? It was mine! And he was also wearing my overcoat.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dandridge," he smiled with bland impudence. "But I couldn't help overhearing your discussion; and it struck me that this might be a way of getting me safely through the Inspector's lines. Do you think I will pass muster?"

As he spoke, he took a turn or two across the floor; and I heard Sara give a low gasp of astonishment, and then her ripple of applauding laughter.

"Perfect!" she exclaimed. "You are more Mr. Dandridge than he is himself."

I suppose everyone gets more or less miffed at an invasion of his personality; and in my case, insult was added to injury by Sara's mocking chuckles. Even my ears grew red.

"The ruse may serve your purpose very nicely, Mr. O'Connor," I said stiffly. "But what about me? I can't appear to leave the house twice, you know, not to mention having to stroll forth this icy night bareheaded and without a coat. Either alternative can hardly fail to raise a question."

"Forgive me!" Lord Harry showed a graceful contrition. "I see I am wrong, have been too impulsive. But it seemed such a simple, easy way out of the dilemma. The police have a change of shift at midnight; and it struck me that if I left before that time, and you went after the hour, it would never be noticed. The new fellows coming on wouldn't know what sort of a hat or coat you were wearing, and I thought my things would probably serve you until we could exchange again tomorrow. That was the plan I had in mind. But of course —?" He hesitated.

"I think it is just too clever for anything," Sara

broke in admiringly. "And of course, now that he understands, Mr. Dandridge will be a sport and help us out. You know what a mess I will be in, unless you do," she said to me.

I adored Sara Fosdick; but at that moment I could cheerfully have shaken her. It galled me to have her side with Lord Harry in putting over his cheeky stratagem at my expense. I could see nothing in it but a lot of awkward entanglements. Still I realized that if I continued obstinate, I would only antagonize Sara without helping matters along an inch; and so reluctantly I yielded.

Ten minutes later, Lord Harry, muffled up to the ears in my heavy storm-coat, and with my hat set on his head at just the angle I wore it, walked with what Sara informed me was an exact imitation of my stride, out of the house.

From behind the drawn curtain, she and I watched him go down the steps. At the bottom he stopped—bravado, I am sure—and lighted a cigarette. A dark figure in the shadow of a house opposite started toward him; then as he—or rather myself, as it must have appeared to the observer—started off down the street, the other man fell back into his shadow again, and Lord Harry walked on unchallenged.

Sara released the breath she had been holding in her excited suspense.

"He's done it!" she exclaimed.

"And I'm wondering," I muttered, "if he hasn't also done me."

As we left the window and went back to the library, I glanced at the clock. It was just on the stroke of eleven; and I could not leave until after twelve. An hour and over, alone with Sara!

Impossible to fill it with ordinary, casual conversation; equally impossible to take up a discussion of the case. How could I plan future moves with Sara, if she was going to disregard the opinions of Curran and myself, and hurl herself wilfully into all sorts of danger? I felt miserably that I wanted nothing so little in the world as to quarrel with her, and yet, under the circumstances, it seemed inevitable.

But I had failed to reckon on her capacity for lightning change of mood.

I was sitting in silence on one side of the fireplace, and she was lounging in a chair across from me; the flames from the burning logs threw a warm glow over her black, filmy gown, and brought out sparkles of light in the jet buckles of her slippers. Her elbows were on the arms of her chair, her chin



on her interlaced fingers; she was looking at me from under her eyelashes.

"You're dreadfully huffy," she said, "and really, you ought not to be. You should instead be warmly congratulating me. The end has justified the means. I think it is a great stroke of luck that we have Lord Harry, with his cleverness and his sources of information, on our side. I knew instinctively that it was a race between Herbert and us to get those letters, and I saw a quick and easy way to secure them. Curran was so frightfully slow. I couldn't foresee all these complications, could I?"

"Has it ever struck you?" I asked, "that I might be hurt, rather deeply too, by the way you shut me out from your confidence? It was like the slam of a door in my face. I had gone wholeheartedly into this thing. I was so ready to coöperate with you, but for some reason, some lack in myself, you didn't regard me as worth your consideration."

"I wanted to let you know," she cried, "I wanted to talk it all over with you, and have you plan it all with me. But don't you understand? I had promised both Miss Mouse and her brother that I would not speak of his part in the affair to any one. It was only last night that I coaxed them around. They were not very willing at that, but they finally

did say that I could tell you. That was a very great compliment too, you absurdly sensitive Anthony Dandridge!"

Last night! A word from her and the world had changed, it was no longer gray and bleak, but warm and shining. I had not compelled her confidence, after all; she had been willing, eager to give it to me all the time. She had won permission to break her promise, even before I learned from Graham Smith of her association with Lord Harry.

I melted to such an extent that if I had not kept a firm grip on myself, I would have become fatuous. I had been dreading that hour and a half ahead of me for fear we would quarrel. I began to dread it now for another reason. I was afraid I should be babbling my love for her before I knew it.

To save myself, I reverted to the robbery.

"I have something to tell you too. I think I know where the stolen letters are." And then I described my dinner with Atchison and our later conversation.

"I would never have believed it of him," she said, "but since he is Adelbron's lawyer, of course you are right." Her brow puckered, "Yet, if he has those letters, how did he get them?" As usual, she had put her finger on the crux of the matter.

"You told me that neither Herbert, nor this old man they call the 'Missionary' had the opportunity to communicate with anyone."

"I'm sorry," I said, "to remind you of another possibility—Miss Mouse and her brother. We have nothing but their word to prove that the letters were not in the safe when Lord Harry made his visit. I told him so tonight, just to let him know that we had thought of it."

"No," she made a gesture of dissent, "it was not they. No matter what he might do, Miss Mouse was with him every moment of the time, and I'd stake my life on her fidelity. And Curran believes that the safe was opened by the 'Missionary', which dovetails exactly with the report Lord Harry brought back to me."

"Yes, but don't you see," I argued, "that we are assuming that the 'Missionary' was after the letters when he called as Professor Quigley that afternoon? You forget that the jewels were also taken. Isn't it more likely that an old-time cracksman would ——?"

Her face wore its best Sphinx expression, perfectly blank; she held it for a minute, and then her lips twitched uncontrollably, and she began to laugh.

"I took the jewels myself."

"You!"

"Yes," nodding her head back and forth, "after Lord Harry came to the restaurant and told me what he had discovered, I hurried back home and went at once to the safe. I was afraid to leave my jewels there, ready to Herbert's hand; and so I took them, and put them where I knew they would be safe. Then I went back to the museum, and raised an alarm."

"Thereby materially disarranging Herbert's plans," I said. "A methodical chap like that would have some plausible tale all ready to account for the burglary, one that would relieve him of all suspicion, and your premature discoveries put him in a hole. I remember he was terribly upset that night, and when the watchman told of seeing him return to the house, he didn't know what to think. He must have been sweating with terror."

"Look here," I dragged my chair nearer hers in my enthusiasm, "this clears up a lot of things. The disappearance of the jewels has been the most perplexing feature of the affair to me. A small package of letters might possibly have been passed to a confederate by Herbert or the 'Missionary', even under the eyes of Curran's men, but hardly so large a bundle as those jewels would have made. But the

fact that the jewels were left in the safe, makes it almost certain that the 'Missionary' was after the letters; and if so, it exonerates Miss Mouse and her brother."

"I'm glad you see that," she said, "for I am sure of it. Go on, I'm getting no end of ideas from,—what is it the newspapers call it?—Oh yes, your masterly summing up."

"Don't flatter me," I begged, "it scatters my wits. But how does this strike you as a theory? Adelbron really knew your mother, perhaps had seen those jewels, and was haunted by the desire to get them. Consequently, she kept track of you. Slowly and cautiously she turned the circumstances over in her mind, until she finally developed a bold scheme of blackmail. She could not swing it alone though, and so she took one or two others into her confidence. Herbert, an expert forger of old documents, but also a man who could secure good credentials on his merits, obtained a position with your grandfather with one end in view, to find out where your list was kept, and copy it.

"He succeeded in this, but afterward, he either became frightened or had one of those sudden changes of heart that Lord Harry ascribes to him, and insisted on having some legal guidance. I don't

believe Adelbron liked the suggestion, but Herbert must have won out, and Atchison was consulted. He saw at once the possibilities in it. Your grandfather, he was sure, would never let the case come to trial; it would be compromised and your grandfather would pay heavily for silence."

"Do you think that Mr. Atchison had anything to do with the murder of Grand?" Sara's voice rang harshly.

"No, no," I was a little shocked, "Atchison would never be so crude as that. I think he sent Adelbron to your grandfather to feel him out. Mr. Fosdick was ready for her and returned fire, with such effect that Adelbron retired in disorder. She, probably, hurried to Atchison, and he, finding that your grandfather held trumps of which Adelbron was in deadly fear, and discovering the nature of those trumps, was quite ready, even anxious to drop the case, and have no more to do with the turbulent seeress.

"The death of your grandfather, though, altered the situation, and Atchison was not above turning it to advantage. Through Herbert or some one else in the house, he learned that those trumps were the Spanish letters, which were kept, in all probability, in the document safe. Easy enough for him then,

with his large and varied acquaintance in the underworld, to secure an expert cracksman, and have Herbert admit him to the museum. Also, in some way, the stolen correspondence was transmitted to him. He has it. I am dead sure of that."

"Leaving us without a leg to stand on." There was a shadow on Sara's face as she looked at me. "Is that what you are trying to tell me, Mr. Dandridge? You feel that our only course is to surrender and take the best terms offered?"

"No," I said obstinately. "You must remember that I have been sitting here talking out a theory of mine. It may be far from the facts. But I do know one thing, and that is that somewhere in this web of fraud and forgery, there is a loose strand. Atchison would never have spent an evening explaining the insurmountable difficulties of our position, if this were not so. Still, even so, we may not be able to catch the loose thread, and unravel the web. But—to lie down, to give in, to let them murder as they will, and then rob you of a fortune, no; it's too disgustingly flabby."

I got up and stood looking down at her.

"I'm only the junior partner," I said, "don't forget that. If Plummer were here, he would advise you to settle. All the unpleasant consequences Atchi-



son pointed out are true. There will be publicity to burn. Knowing that, it is for you to decide."

"What would you do, if you were in my place?" she asked softly.

"Me! I'd spar for time, play them along with every trick in the category, and then, if I had to go down, go down fighting, before I'd give in to such a gang of murdering high-binders."

Her eyes were shining like stars.

"Oh, I was afraid you were not going to say that," she cried, "I was afraid you would be prudent and legal-minded, and keep your eyes fixed on nothing but that nasty, searing publicity. And I want you to know that I'm with you, with you all the way. Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute." She sprang up from her chair, and caught my hand in hers. "We'll fight them till hell freezes over, you and I."

We stood there with clasped hands; animated by one purpose, drawn together, fused in sympathy and understanding. It was a dangerous moment. The intimacy of the hour, the warm fire-lighted room, and Sara so near me. Sara, with a warm glow on her olive cheek, and parted, ardent lips. I had but to reach out to take her in my arms. God knows I was mad to do so; and yet instinctively, intuitively,

I knew that it was not my time. The emotion that thrilled her was not love. It was the battle spirit of that old buccaneer, her grandfather, flaming up in answer to a challenge. Her present warmth of manner was merely in recognition of me as an ally, nothing more.

I let her hands fall, making a pretence of lighting a cigarette. If I had spoken she would have noticed the shakiness of my voice. The clock helped me out by striking at that moment.

"Half past twelve!" I exclaimed naturally, if a bit huskily. I could hardly believe that the time had passed so swiftly; "I can go in safety now, I hope."

In the hall I found the hat and coat which Lord Harry had left behind him, and put them both on, not knowing that Sara had followed me from the library to let me out, until I heard her catch her breath.

"Startling!" she breathed, "Mr. Herbert was about the same height as you and Lord Harry, and that coat with the high shoulders—I thought for a moment it was he.

"Look!" she caught me by the arm and whirled me about to face a mirror on the opposite wall, and I too was amazed. In that faint light, with only the outlines of Herbert's rather individual coat and

hat showing, I might easily have been taken for him.

Sara was standing, her finger on her lips, her eyes concentrated.

"I have an idea," she said. "It isn't clear yet, but we ought to be able to use this some way."

I shook my head.

"I am no actor as O'Connor is. The moment I opened my mouth or took a step, I'd give myself away."

"But just to present yourself—to let yourself be seen—dimly, for a moment—might give such a shock—especially tonight—that something might be said or done, before you were recognized. Oh, I know it sounds fantastic. But a sudden cry or exclamation might be of help to us now. Take Atchison, for instance. It would mean something to us, wouldn't it, just to learn that he knew Herbert?"

"It would certainly be a confirmation of our theory; but you don't know Atchison very well. He is far too quick witted to be caught napping."

"Don't put stones in our path." She was in the grip of an idea and not to be gainsaid. "I have a feeling, an impulse, and when it comes, I always follow its promptings."

More from a desire to please her, than from any

conviction of my own, I went to the telephone, and called up Atchison's apartment; his man answered me, and said that Mr. Atchison was at the Scarabeus Club, and was not expected home before one o'clock.

"Hurry," urged Sara; "you will catch him as he comes out. Stand on the sidewalk, so he can't miss seeing you."

I couldn't disappoint her although it seemed an awfully silly and futile proceeding.

"Very well," I said resignedly, "I'll take a shot at it, if Curran's men don't hold me up too long as I leave the house."

To forestall them if possible, I slipped out of the Herbertian coat and threw it across my arm; then I creased the soft gray hat in another fashion, yet I was hardly out of the house before someone flashed an electric torch in my face.

"Mr. Dandridge?" a gruff voice questioned with a touch of surprise. "Why, we had you down as leaving the house a couple of hours ago."

"I don't wonder you thought so. Another caller—absent-minded idiot—walked off with my hat and overcoat. And his too small for me. A nice fix for such a night, isn't it? Now I'll have to chase him half over town to get my things back."

I signalled a passing cab, and gave the direction,

"Scarabeus Club," then turned back to the policeman.

"No need to get you into trouble over that fool's blundering," I said, "let it pass. I'll keep mum to the Inspector."

That settled, and myself safely inside the cab, I put on the gray overcoat again, and restored the hat to its original creases. By the time I had finished this to my satisfaction, the distance had been covered, and we had drawn up before the club.

Getting out, I paid off the cabman, and took my stand on the sidewalk, a little to one side of the club entrance. A biting wind was whistling around the corner, and there was a slight fog, not too dense, for which I was thankful. Passers-by and occasional club members going in or out, looked at me curiously. It is doubtful if I would have held my station long, if Atchison had been slow in making his appearance, but luck was with me. It was not more than five minutes before I saw him coming through the vestibule, and alone.

Buttoning his coat, he exchanged a word or two with the doorman, then, unctuous and smiling, swung through the revolving door and saw me. He glanced right and left, then took a swift stride toward me, his face dark with anger.

"This is of a piece with your general clumsiness, Haworth. Didn't I tell you never to come near me? You should have used some other channel, if you have found those missing——"

He stopped short, and thrust his face close to mine.

"Dandridge!" catching me by the shoulders. "What is the meaning of this masquerade?"

"Masquerade!" I repeated uncomprehendingly. "I don't know what you mean?"

My heart was jumping. Sara was justified. Atchison, the suave, surefooted, Atchison, had stumbled.

It was only for a moment, "Forgive me, my dear fellow," he said, with a very fair imitation of his usual mellow laugh, "I mistook you in this fog for a half-crazed moron who has been following me about under the impression that he has a grievance against me. Your coat and hat are similar to his, and that accounts for my ridiculous error."

"Sorry to have startled you," I said, "although, like my half-witted prototype, I must plead guilty to following you around. The truth is, I was very anxious to see you, and when I called up your apartment, your man told me that I would probably find you at this club. As I reached the door, I saw you

coming out, and waited. I want to ask a favor of you."

"Yes?"

"I would like to postpone our examination of that Adelbron receipt for a few days. It is possible, you see, that we may establish it as a fraud by other evidence."

"Indeed? Strictly between us, Dandridge, I wish that might be so, but I am afraid——"

"Your wish may come true. Mr. Fosdick's curator, Herbert, died very suddenly this evening, and before I take any further steps, I want to go through his papers. I have reason to believe that we may find some data among them, bearing materially on this Adelbron claim."

This was an inspiration of the moment on my part, and I knew it jolted him, although he had himself too well in hand now to show it.

"Take all the time you want." He pumped the heartiness into his voice with difficulty. "And good luck to you in your hunting. You must drop in to dine with me some evening soon. I enjoyed our little session together last night immensely. Good night."

And with a wave of his gloved hand, he crossed the sidewalk to a cab.



## CHAPTER XV

ELATED but weary I entered my apartment to find Graham Smith in possession. He had cajoled the janitor into opening the door for him, had lighted a fire in the grate, and was now seated before it, in my favorite chair, with a box of my cigarettes and a bottle of my most prized Scotch beside him.

"You're keeping late hours these days, my lad," he shook his head at me owlishly as I came in. "Stead of the midnight oil, you're burning the midnight gasoline. Did John Marshall or Rufus Choate go helling around this way at your age? They did not. Certioraris not supper clubs for them; torts not taxicabs. The skin they loved to touch was the full calf of their law books."

"Well, if you object so much to my staying up," I broke in with asperity, "your complaint will soon be removed, for this night at least. I am going to turn in now, right away; and that means that you are going to turn out."

"Oh no, I'm not, Tony." He threw another log on the fire and settled himself deeper in his chair. "You don't think I've been hanging around here for the last hour or so to beat it now, without having a little talk with you, do you? Things are getting a bit too thick for you to try and play 'possum on me any longer."

"Where's your nose for mystery trails leading you now?" I made a weak stab at failing to understand. "Am I the unknown suspect in the latest shocking denouement of love and intrigue? What things are you talking about?"

"This Fosdick business of course." He pitched another half smoked cigarette into the fire; the hearth was littered with them. "The manner and method of old Jerome's death was not without a flavor of suspicion; and when now, a short time afterward, his museum curator kicks off in exactly the same way, don't you think one is rather justified in asking, 'what about it?' "

"Well, *what* about it?" I asked, leaning against the mantelpiece and trying to look bored and sleepy. "There are a dozen deaths of the sort every day I suppose. Weak hearts are not especially uncommon in New York."

"Still, I hadn't heard that they were epidemic

on the upper East side," he returned, unyielding as fate. "Better come across, Tony, and save us both trouble."

I was seized with a sudden temptation. Graham had not built up his reputation as the best newspaper detective in town on flimsy foundations. He had an unusual faculty for scenting the thing hidden behind the things which were revealed, no matter how plausible the presentation. He could gather up scattered and seemingly unrelated fragments of fact, and piece them together with infinite patience until he had made a complete story. He knew his trade; there were many things he didn't know, but he knew his trade. And he was apt too, to be more open-minded, less conventional and hidebound in his deductions than Curran. Why then not test against his experience, intuitions, and hard discernment, the hypothesis on which we were working.

This is the way I argued the matter to myself, laying more emphasis on the pros than the cons. Maybe, there was a touch of vanity in my impulse. I was thrilling with the knowledge that I had scored in a bout with Atchison, and I felt expansive and communicative; it was hard to put the padlock of secrecy on such a triumphant achievement.

I pulled a chair up to the hearth and sat down.

"If I let you in on something, Graham, will you promise to keep it under your hat, and not make any use of it, until I say you can?"

He made a face worthy of a Chinese dragon.

"The old, infernal confidence stuff," he groaned, "I never get on the track of a really good story, but what somebody tries to slip that muzzle on me." His face smoothed out in a twinkling then as he realized that he might have gone too far and shut off the confidence for which he was angling. "But don't mind me, old son. You know from childhood days that discretion is my second name. Go ahead, Tony; I'm a graveyard. Spill your story without fear."

"That's what I want of you," I said, "to help me make a story out of a mixed lot of suspicions and incidents."

The avid, professional gleam showed in his round, bulging eyes.

"Shoot," he said briefly.

I told him the whole thing, beginning with my meeting with Jerome Fosdick and his granddaughter on New Year's eve at the Plaza, and ending with my recent encounter with Atchison.

After I had finished, he said nothing for at least five minutes, looking more than ever like a caricature of a statue of Buddha.

‘What was it Atchison said when he first saw you?’ he asked at last; ‘I mean when he bawled you out as the supposed Herbert or Haworth? Try to remember his exact words.’

‘That’s easy. I got them pat at the time. What he said was: ‘This is of a piece with your general clumsiness, Haworth. Didn’t I tell you never to come near me? You should have used some other channel if you have located the missing—’ And then he recognized me and stopped.’

‘Picture puzzle for beginners. If it’s all as easy as that—. Now, listen Tony.’ He held up one hand and checked off the points as he made them on his fingers, ‘Atchison spoke to that man (you) as Haworth, which shows that knowing his real name, he must also have known his criminal record. But, more important still, that ‘Didn’t I tell you never to come near me?’ shows that they had been in some sort of a deal together. We’re pretty sure that that deal was the theft of the letters, and, since the safe was opened expertly, the bungling must have been in their delivery to Atchison. The clue comes in the next sentence when he says that something is missing. What? Why a part, an invaluable part too, of the stolen correspondence. It looks to me as if, in the process of transmis-

sion, one or more of those letters was lost or mislaid."

"Ah!" I cried, "the weak link in the chain. Atchison was paternally concerned over Miss Fosdick's terrible position in case this claim against the estate should become public, in the hope that he could frighten us into a compromise."

"Right," Smith agreed. "And he invited you to dinner to sound you out on that, and also to see if your side might possibly have picked up that missing something he wants so badly."

"I don't think he got anything out of me," I said dubiously.

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't," Smith spoke with his customary pessimism in regard to his friends. "Atchison is pretty hard to fool. That line of yours tonight about looking through the curator's papers was rather clever, though. Still it never does to bank on having pulled any wool over that old devil's eyes."

He had another season of meditation, and then woke up and leaning over, tapped me on the knee.

"The atmosphere's getting clearer, and I can see a little more of the scenery, a few outstanding peaks," he said. "Tony, there are two lines of investigation to be followed. The object of one is

to smash the blackmail plot, and leads direct to Atchison. The purpose of the other is to catch the murderer of Jerome Fosdick and this Haworth, for the same person attended to both of them; and the compass, as I study it, points straight to Adelbron."

"Everyone knows that," I said. "She's behind it all, but who is shooting those poison darts? She has an unbreakable alibi."

"Now there, Tony," said Graham, with something approaching approval, "you have asked a really intelligent question. Who is shooting those poison darts? That's the joker in this pack that makes it really worth my consideration." Graham's conceit was so colossal that you couldn't laugh at it, you merely gaped with awe and respect. "Now," helping himself to another liberal dose of Scotch, "I have given you the two leads. Question is, which do you think the most important?"

"Well, speaking as the lawyer for the Fosdick estate, I should say the smashing of the blackmail scheme first. If we let these crooks establish any kind of a hold, there's no telling where they will stop. On the other hand, Miss Fosdick, I know, is far more interested in finding the murderer of her grandfather; and her wishes go, of course."



"I'm with her—for once," Smith said grudgingly. For some reason he objected to Sara. "And," slapping the arm of his chair, "say what you will, Tony, there's a kick to a murder feature that you can't get in anything else; and this one, when I find out a few things and get ready to spring it, is going to put me right in the center of the biggest spotlight in town." His bulbous eyes gazed fixedly at unseen headlines. "Sherlock Holmes Of The Press Unearths—" His voice trailed off and he was again lost in a brown study.

It was some time before he came to the surface, and then he got up and put on his hat and coat, casting an unpleasant glance at me.

"I've got some real thinking to do, and it can't be done here, with you poking the fire and kicking your feet against the fender."

I had not stirred, but it was useless to protest. If anything went wrong with Graham, he always blamed it on the other fellow. Nevertheless I was grateful to him, and I had a feeling that he was pretty sure to give us some valuable assistance. Luck had been with us this evening, at least, and I laid my tired head on the pillow with a prayer that it might not hasten its departure.

My faith, however, must have been small; for no

later than the next morning, I drew the hasty conclusion that unstable fortune had again turned its back on me. This was owing to a call I received from Professor Markham.

My first idea, when his name was brought into my office, was that he might be bringing some belated information in regard to the evening Herbert had spent with him; but as he maundered on in a vague, absent-minded way about nothing in particular, the suggestion faded. Then it struck me that he might be in some difficulty that required legal adjustment; but again I decided I was at fault. Hard to tell what he *was* after. Try as I would, I seemed unable to get him to the point.

At last, though, when my patience was almost exhausted, he paused as with a sudden recollection.

"But I must apologize for taking up a busy man's time," he said. "It was in regard to the death of Mr. Herbert that I came to you. Really, I do not know when Mrs. Markham and I have been so shocked. Quite incidentally I called up the Fosdick museum this morning, and was abruptly informed of his sudden passing. You can imagine how Mrs. Markham and I felt. We had no idea, you see, that he was other than in robust health. Why, it was only a short time ago that he dined with us. A

delightful companion, Mr. Dandridge; a man of rare and varied attainments."

"He was, indeed," I murmured.

"Yes; a great loss." The professor sighed. "And under the circumstances, my telephoning may have seemed—well, rather intrusive. I do hope that Miss Fosdick—it was her secretary who answered me—will understand that I was ignorant of the facts. Appalled as I was by the news, I may not have made myself clear on that point. Indeed, Mrs. Markham said afterward that she feared I had not expressed myself entirely felicitously."

So that was the purpose of his visit to me. He was afraid that his telephoning might be regarded as indelicate or lacking in propriety, and he wanted me to present his apologies.

"Oh, Miss Fosdick will think nothing of that," I assured him, and began rustling my papers. But Markham was apparently impervious to all hints, even when Graham Smith was announced, and I said in clear tones, "Show him in."

"There was something else I intended to speak to you about, I think." He ruffled his brow, turning his hat absent-mindedly around in his hands.

"You will probably recall it later. If you do, you can telephone me, Professor."

I had him by the elbow now, and was edging him toward the door, when he stopped.

"Ah, I have it!" he exclaimed. "I knew there was something else. I suppose, Mr. Dandridge, there will be an executor or administrator appointed to take charge of Mr. Herbert's estate?"

"Yes; that is, if he left any estate." The suggestion struck me that Herbert might have had some rare coin or medal that the old fellow wanted for his own collection. "Is there anything of his that you would like to have?"

"Oh, no; nothing of that sort," he protested. "It is merely that I have some papers belonging to him; and as Mrs. Markham and I are going abroad—we sail on Saturday—I wanted to turn them over to the proper authority."

My pulse quickened its beat.

"Papers belonging to him?" I repeated. "What sort of papers?"

"Two letters, and a sheet that I take to be cataloguing memoranda. And perhaps, strictly speaking, 'belonging to him,' is not correct; for one of the letters is addressed to the late Mr. Fosdick. Mr. Herbert must have left them inadvertently the night he dined with us; for Mrs. Markham found them yesterday stuffed behind the cushions of a davenport

in our sitting room. It was to acquaint him with their discovery that I called him up this morning."

I swallowed once or twice, but even then my voice came huskily. I held out a firm hand, though.

"If you will entrust me with them, Professor, I will see that all legal requirements are met. The letter to Mr. Fosdick belongs, no doubt, to his files, and should be returned. Let me see them, please."

He fumbled in his pockets and brought out a slim package. I sifted it quickly. A note from an antique dealer asking Herbert to expertize some bronzes for him. A leaf of typed memoranda for the museum catalogue on which he had been working, and an envelope bearing Jerome Fosdick's name, with the address written in a sloping foreign hand. There was no letter inside, only a blank sheet of paper folded about a photograph. A photograph of an elderly man with a flowing gray mustache, and a face which would have been strikingly handsome, if one side of it had not been disfigured by deep scars. Underneath the portrait was written in Spanish, "Yours, through the bond which unites us," and the signature, "Eugenio de Guzman y Manara."

Graham Smith must have come in unnoticed while

I stood there, for I heard him breathing heavily in my ear, and felt him jogging my elbow.

"The man with the scar," he muttered. "Oh boy!" Then before I had quite come to, he had taken command of the situation.

"Professor Markham, isn't it? My name is Smith, and I have just dropped in to see Mr. Dandridge in regard to this man in the photograph. Something of importance connected with him has come up in the settlement of the Fosdick estate."

Tactful. My respect for Graham was increasing by leaps and bounds, and I hastened to play up to him by pressing Markham cordially into a chair.

"If you will answer a few questions, Professor, I will explain the whole thing to you later, rather a complicated, technical matter," Graham put it definitely into the background with a wave of his hand. "That night that Mr. Herbert dined with you, did any one else call during the evening, or after he left?"

Markham rubbed one hand nervously over the other.

"I am quite sure not. You see Mr. Herbert and myself spent the entire evening in rearranging my collection, and when he left Mrs. Markham and myself retired immediately."

"Some one probably came in the next morning then?"

The professor looked slightly embarrassed, although there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Neither my wife nor myself was in a mood to see visitors the next morning, Mr. Smith. I do not usually remember events so clearly, but we rose to find no preparations for breakfast, no maid, the kitchen in the greatest disorder; all of the dishes used the night before, a vast quantity of them too, to wash. Very trying. My wife thought the girl must be ill, and telephoned to her address, but she had packed up her belongings and left there early in the morning, leaving no future address. We have heard nothing from her since, which is strange, as we owe her a week's wages. She probably received some sudden summons."

"She did," said Smith with deep conviction.

"Professor," I asked, "would it have been possible for this maid to have gone into the living room while the rest of you were at dinner?"

"Oh, yes. I have no doubt that she did so. It was a cold night and the fire needed frequent mending."

"You don't remember the maid's name and address?"



"Her name? Yes, it was Clara Downey." And unexpectedly enough, he also recalled the employment bureau which had recommended her to them some months before.

Smith was very casual about it.

"The reason we have put you through this cross-examination, Professor," he explained, "is that you have brought only a part of the missing Fosdick documents, and I thought the girl might have carried off or destroyed the rest. But that hardly seems likely. Mr. Herbert probably mislaid them, and they will be found. Still, if this Clara should turn up again, let us know, will you?"

Markham assured him that he would, and after the exchange of various amenities, we finally got him out.

"In this," Smith remarked after he had uttered heartfelt thanksgivings, "I discern the fine hand of Atchison, and he doesn't leave any finger prints. Trust him to see that when her work was done, the maid disappeared and left no trace. Even if we found her, it wouldn't do us any good. Under a third degree all she could tell was that she was bribed by Herbert to get that bunch of letters from the cushions of the davenport that night and hand them over to some mysterious person who would call for

them. So I don't see that it's worth while wasting time looking for her."

He picked up the photograph again.

"The thing to do now, Tony, is to get in touch with Don Eugenio de Guzman y Manara. You'd better look after that. I've got to be at the office."

"And I will go down to the Spanish Consulate and dig up what information I can. Suppose we meet at the Lawyers Club for luncheon about two o'clock."

"Suits me," said Graham, and we went out to the elevator together.

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN I reached the club, about two hours later, I found Smith there ahead of me.

"And what," he asked as soon as we had sat down at a table and given our order, "did you find out at the Consul General's office; anything about the Don?"

"General, if you please," I corrected. "No trouble at all in identifying him. I simply had to show the photograph. They gave me, too, a complete transcript of his pedigree, one of the oldest families in Spain, and also of his distinguished military services. He got those scars, by the way, in a duel with sabres when he was quite young. You can read the particulars if you are interested. But they were lost when it came to throwing any light on the bond that united him with Jerome Fosdick; had no idea what that might mean. He left one son—the General died about two years ago—but this boy entered the church, and they do not know where he may be.

Perhaps in a monastery in Spain or he may have been sent to some remote part of the globe. And that's that. But I have cabled to Madrid for full information."

"Quick work," Graham remarked, "and you'll get a quick answer—from Spain. I should say in about three months."

"You're so sunshiny, Smith, always cheerful and inspiring, but this time your croaking doesn't affect me, for the person I cabled to was not a Spaniard, but our old classmate, 'Skates' Conger. He has been Secretary of Legation over there for the last four years, and if he's anything like as inquisitive as he used to be in college, he knows the unwritten secret memoirs of every person of prominence in the country. I cabled him to send me at once all the information he could get about the late General Guzman y Manara, and also to get in touch with the son if possible and find out what was the tie or association between his father and Jerome Fosdick."

"That," Graham conceded, "is more like it. If 'Skates' doesn't know the size of the late General's shoes and his preference in breakfast foods, it will be because the General didn't wear shoes or eat breakfast. Really, you couldn't have gone to a better shop, Tony."

Approbation from Graham was so rare that I feared something must be wrong, but he soon qualified it.

"Too bad though, that you didn't have sense enough to ask him for some pointers on our interesting little friend, the seeress. 'Skates' was always investigating the claims of some psychic or other. You remember that fake spiritualistic meeting he busted up at Cambridge? I'll bet he has Adelbron's number, if any one has."

Graham may be a crab, but he does have good ideas.

"I should have thought of that," I said meekly, "I will send him a supplementary message this afternoon; but wait a minute—what he tells us about General Guzman y Manara may throw all the light we need on the lady's activities. Fosdick had only to describe him to send her scooting for cover."

We finished our luncheon and walked back to my office to find that an answer to my cabled inquiry had just come in.

"Good old 'Skates'!" I exclaimed as I tore it open, "Right up to the minute. No *mañana por la mañana* theory for him."

But as I read it, my elation evaporated. Smith saw from my face that something was wrong.

"Has he fallen down?" he asked, "you look like bad news."

I passed the cablegram over to him and he read it aloud.

Impossible to communicate with Primo de Guzman y Manara, son of the General, as he entered Trappist Monastery two years ago, and is under vow, of silence. Even his place of retreat unknown. As to subject of inquiry can only give you a mass of hearsay and gossip which can not be confirmed. Latter part of life appears to have been clouded by domestic tragedies, but too proud to have any confidants. Single known fact I can give is that only daughter ran away from home, and became a dancer at low cantinas and cabarets. Said to have got into trouble with the police, and to have left the country either under the protection of or married to young American, and to have died later in South America. For possible particulars refer you to a relative, Juan Manara, importer, 350 Beaver Street, New York.

Graham's face was impenetrable as he finished, but I knew what he was thinking, and his thoughts were mine. Instead of helping us, this information seemed to strengthen and reinforce the claims of Adelbron. And I was swept by the desolating knowledge of the blow such a revelation would be to Sara. Children who have never known their parents always idealize them, and invest them with an al-

most sacred quality. I remembered her voice, when, at the conclusion of Adelbron's story, she had asked her grandfather how much of it was true, and he had assured her that it was all false; but then, he would have considered that a justifiable perjury.

I looked up to find Smith's eyes on me, and felt a sudden, violent impulse to smash him in the face. I knew from that gleam in them just what he was thinking, that the adventures of Sara's mother would give added sensationalism and piquancy to his newspaper story when it came to be written, but second thoughts prompted me to control my ungrateful and homicidal desires. After all, Graham had been useful, and might be more so.

"Trust Conger to pick up any rotten, backstairs gossip that's around," I said bitterly.

Smith was silent, and I got into my overcoat and picked up my hat.

"I am going down to see this Juan Manara or whatever his name is," I glanced again at Conger's message to note the address, and put it in my pocket.

"Want me to go along?" Smith asked.

I did not, and I told him so, although I expressed it more diplomatically, saying that when he found it was a family matter on which I had come to interview him, Juan Manara might presumably be ex-



tremely reticent, in fact he might even resent my inquiries; and if I appeared accompanied by Smith, a newspaper man, he would probably shut up like a clam.

Graham accepted this, and I started off alone; but it struck me presently that a witness might be advisable. Foreigners, too, are apt to have a respect for the physical embodiment of the law. So I stopped at Curran's office to see if he could go with me.

He looked up from his desk as I came in and nodded distantly.

"Sit down," his tone was as frosty as his manner, "I was thinking of either going to see you, or asking you to come here, whichever was most convenient." He leaned back in his chair and looked at me steadily, a wrinkle between his brows. "I am a great believer in coöperation, as you probably know, and I have not been getting it. If you and Miss Fosdick think that you can handle this case better than I can, I am ready to retire and give you free swing; but I can't go on with all of us playing at cross purposes as we are now."

"I don't blame you, Inspector, for feeling as you do, but there was no intention of setting you aside as the directing head."

"What else can you call it, when you and Miss Fosdick follow up some lead of your own, and leave me in the dark about it? Not a word to me, when I dropped in there last night, and you," his hard sharp eyes bored through me, "even tried to fix it so that my men wouldn't report that another person was spending the evening with you, a notorious crook by the way."

Before I could say anything there was a ring on the telephone, and, as sometimes happens, the words of the message were quite audible to me although I was a foot or two away from the instrument.

"This is Sara Fosdick, Inspector," the voice, brassy and metallic, anything but Sara's, rasped on my ear. "I hear that you have been interviewing L. H., today, and that he was rather uncommunicative. So stupid of him, for of course, you should know everything that happens, and I am sure that none of us dreamed of leaving you in the dark. We all rely on you too thoroughly."

Even the squeak and rattle of the telephone could not destroy that note of soft persuasion which Sara could make so effective.

"But," she went on, "things have been happening so fast that we have hardly had time to catch our breaths; and we felt so important too, we thought

we had so much to tell you. But of course you had to get ahead of us, and spoil our little triumph with your darned shrewdness. How did you ever discover that L. H. had been at the house last night? Can't you come up and let me tell you all about it? Or perhaps it would be more convenient for you to see Mr. Dandridge?"

"Mr. Dandridge is here now," he answered.

"Splendid. Tell him to explain the whole thing to you. We are very anxious to have your opinion of it. Goodby."

"I couldn't help overhearing," I said as he hung up the receiver, "so I'll follow orders and go ahead."

Then briefly and succinctly I told him of Lord Harry's relationship to Miss Mouse, of his part in the robbery and also Sara's, of our adventures of the night before, culminating in my encounter with Atchison; and of my later interview with Graham Smith and what had ensued from it.

He listened closely to every word, busy the while with his tranquillizing pencil.

"Good work!" he said when I had finished, and rising, reached for his hat. "Come on, we'll go down now and see this Manara."

In a short time we were threading our way through an old building redolent of cheeses, spices

and preserves, and, it seemed to me that the faint aroma of certain fiery Spanish wines still lingered in the air; until at last we found ourselves in a small dark office in the rear, and there we met Señor Manara, a leather-faced, elderly Spaniard, dressed in black, and with a wide-brimmed black hat on his head, going over his ledgers.

I introduced myself and Curran, giving the latter his title, and the Señor, admirably concealing any surprise he may have felt, accepted us with stately politeness, and offered us chairs, studying us meanwhile with black, piercing eyes. I congratulated myself on the inspiration that had led me into bringing Curran along; for I saw that Manara was impressed with his official position, and devoted to him the utmost attention. I therefore, left it to the Inspector to do the talking.

"Señor Manara," he came directly to the point, "we want some special information about the late General de Guzman y Manara of Madrid, and we have been told that you were the person most likely to have it."

Manara made a deprecating movement with his hands.

"One hears so much that is without foundation," he sighed. "But," shrugging his shoulders, "it ought

not to be difficult to get anywhere this information you seek. General de Guzman y Manara was a distinguished soldier, a man of property, a patriot."

"Yes, certainly," Curran said, "but we are looking for something you can't get in libraries or from obituary notices—some light on his private life and especially his family and domestic affairs."

Manara's eyelids drooped. He delayed answering while he lighted another cigarette.

"Excuse me," he said at last, "but perhaps you will tell me what interest the police department has in the private life or domestic affairs of a worthy Spanish gentleman?"

"Well," Curran took another appreciative puff on the excellent cigar the Señor had offered, "you might say that our interest in him and his family is indirect. We are hoping through a greater knowledge of them to get something that will help us in our investigation of a fortune-telling woman, named Adelbron. That is in confidence, Mr. Manara."

I think we were both startled by the change in Manara. He looked beyond us as if he were gazing into some dark abyss of the past, the lines in his face deepening.

"Adelbron!" he muttered, "*The Fer de Lance!* Ay! You say truly, if you ascribe all the misfor-

tunes of my cousin Eugenio to her. If it will serve to bring her to justice, I will tell you all I know. But I am afraid I can help you little," with a melancholy shake of the head. "I am but a distant relative, and I can only give you the tales told in the family. Eugenio himself did not talk, he confided to no one the sorrows that devastated his home. I can give you some facts; yes. But they would not be admitted as evidence in a court of law."

"Never mind that," Curran said encouragingly, "I've done a lot in my time with stuff that could never be got before a jury. Anyhow, we're not aiming to try Adelbron for something that happened in Spain. We only want to fill in her background. If you can do that for us, I think we can promise your family all the revenge it wants."

That was clever of Curran. At the suggestion of revenge there was a sparkle of fire in the eyes of the Spaniard, and he needed no further inducement to talk.

## CHAPTER XVII

BUT Señor Manara did not begin his story at once; he sat for a long time with bent head, twisting a bit of paper in his fingers. At last he shook off his abstraction, and became again aware of our presence, making a slight deprecatory gesture, as if begging our indulgence.

"I should not keep you gentlemen waiting," he said, "but to speak of those days—it is not pleasant. I do not complain, although it is hard, for I know," fatalistically, "that the time has come at last."

"This Adelbron the first I know of her, she is living at Madrid in a poor little house, in a dirty alley back of the Plaza Mayor. She is not a Spaniard, you understand, although she so claims, but a half-breed from Brazil, the daughter of a Portuguese trader and an Indian woman from a tribe along the upper Amazon. At the time of which I speak, she is telling fortunes to the rabble at a few pesetas, but already there are whispers, things said under the



breath. A sailor is found dead on the street at night, robbed—two, three men. The death seems natural; a weakness of the heart, the doctors say of every case. But in the wine shops where criminals gather, they give her, the Adelbron, a new name. The *Fer de Lance*, they speak it very low; the snake whose stroke is instant death.”

Curran's eyes full of a startled meaning turned to me, as mine did to him.

“Nothing is done,” said Manara, “there is no proof. Also,” with a cynical shrug, “the woman is said to be friendly with an official of the police. *Quien sabe!* But soon she moves to a large house on a fine street. She has a box at the bull fights, the opera, she drives daily in her motor car on the prado. No longer does she receive the poor and ignorant; her clients are drawn from the élite. Wonderful tales are told of her powers. She causes the spirits of the dead to talk and to appear, she sees the future as well as the past, she works spells that bring sickness and misfortune to enemies, and health and prosperity to friends; but always underneath, the ugly whispers, they go on. It is hinted that she uses the confidences given her, and they are many, for purposes of blackmail. There is even a story that one gentleman of high position in the govern-

ment, ruined by her extortions and about to expose her, died while driving in his carriage in broad daylight—a weakness of the heart.” A thin, skeptical smile wrinkled Manara’s cheek. “Again the name, *Fer de Lance*, was murmured in the wine shops, but,” he spread out his hands, “it came to nothing.”

Once more Curran and I exchanged looks. In his there was a mingling of doubt and satisfaction. If I read him right, he was thinking that an axiom of the police—a criminal invariably holds to his established line—had been confirmed. Adelbron was still running true to form. It was the perfection of her alibis which disturbed and perplexed him. But Manara was oblivious to our wireless telegraphy; he was living in events long past and absorbed in his recital of them.

“At this time,” he spoke with a profound melancholy, “my cousin, Eugenio, was at the height of his career. He had served as Minister of War, and would certainly be named as Premier when his party came again into power. No honor seemed beyond him. Also, by inheritance and successful investment, he was one of the richest men in Spain. I,” with a gesture which somehow took in himself, the establishment, his condition of exile, everything about him, “belong to the poorer branch of the

family. But Eugenio. Ah! Everything he touched turned to gold. *El afortunado*, 'Lucky' de Guzman was his soubriquet.

"His home, it was a paradise; his wife beautiful and devoted to him as he to her. They have two children. Primo, a manly lad, who would go into the army, and Estrella, the daughter—God rest her soul!" he crossed himself. "And then the wife went to see this Adelbron.

"It was a visit of curiosity to an oracle-monger, she had heard talked about among her friends. Women are superstitious, interested in such things.

"What Adelbron told her, I do not know, but Donna Inez was so impressed that she went again and again. It was like a wicked snake charming a weak and foolish bird, and always her influence increased. They appeared together in public. Donna Inez would take no step of which Adelbron did not approve. She permitted séances to be held in their home, and the woman installed herself there. This half-breed Portuguese scum the guest of a grandee of Spain!

"Eugenio had no faith in her or her prophecies at first, but continual dropping will wear away a stone. Morning, noon and night he heard of nothing but the miraculous powers of Adelbron, her

omens and predictions. At last he too was persuaded to consult her, to confide to her his secret hopes and fears. That was the end, as far as he was concerned. The ascendancy of that powerful, unscrupulous personality was now complete.

"Only one person dared oppose her, the daughter, Estrella. Primo, the son, might have stood with his sister; I do not know. But he had just won his commission, and was away on service in Africa; and she was left alone to combat the influence of this terrible woman.

"Adelbron, at first, tried to win the girl. In this, she did not succeed, so she set to work to poison the minds of Eugenio and Inez against Estrella. Do not ask me how. I only know that Estrella ran away from home and went to live with an old nurse. Why that woman did not employ the methods that had given her the name of *Fer del Lance*, I cannot say. Perhaps she feared the shock might bring those silly parents to their senses.

"For more than a year, Estrella lived in seclusion; she was not seen by her friends or relatives. There was a story among the peasants of an attempt to kidnap her, and also of a night when Maria, the nurse, sat with a knife between her teeth until daybreak. I suspect that it may have been in re-

sisting such an attempt that Estrella met the American who married her and took her away. What more natural than that a gallant rescue led to a swift romance?

"But we knew nothing of the marriage at that time. No one knew anything. There may have been letters, but if so, Adelbron had them intercepted. More than anything else, she dreaded a reconciliation between the de Guzmans and their daughter. Estrella would never return as long as that creature remained.

"To prevent this, Adelbron did something diabolical. She searched the slums of cities until at last in Barcelona she found a girl who sufficiently resembled my cousin's daughter. This drab of the streets she brought to Madrid, coached her, and then sent her out to the vilest resorts of the town as Estrella de Guzman. It was a scandal which shook society. There were those who denied it was she, but many who believed. It is always so. No one had seen the girl for a long time. Time and a life of dissipation, they said, might easily account for her changed appearance. Also she talked familiarly of the things and people Estrella had known. And the real Estrella de Guzman, ignorant of this, was far away on the other side of the world.

"This girl, the imposter, became implicated in a series of robberies, but through Adelbron's influence with the police, obtained immunity from arrest as long as she stayed away from Madrid. Adelbron cunningly utilized this, and had the report circulated that she had married a Yankee and gone to South America. Thus she made it impossible for the real Estrella ever to return home.

"And now the Donna Inez, overcome by her misfortunes, committed suicide, and that impudent charlatan saw her way clear and aspired—will you believe it?—to become the wife of Eugenio. But at last she had gone too far. The horror and grief my cousin suffered seemed to open his eyes. And soon after, the dance girl who had masqueraded as Estrella, made a dying confession of the deception she had practiced and of Adelbron's responsibility for it.

"Eugenio, in his remorse and self-condemnation, almost lost his mind. Yet his pride remained. Rather than admit his blindness and folly, and become a mock to all Spain, he allowed Adelbron to go unpunished. He forced her, I understand, to return what she had left of the money she inveigled from him, and compelled her to leave Spain. His daughter, as he learned, had died in South

America, his wife was dead. To publish the truth would merely revive the scandal and benefit no one. So it was only to his son that he confided the facts, and Primo took upon himself the duty of expiation; he renounced the world, and entered the Trappist order.

"Eugenio lived on, a tragic recluse, until about two years ago."

Manara sat in a brooding silence which we did not break.

"You will pardon me, gentlemen," he gave an apologetic wave of his narrow hand, "I have talked too long. After all, these things happened over twenty years ago, and can have little bearing on the present."

"You never were more mistaken." Curran was emphatic. "Every word you have said is valuable. You will understand this better when I tell you that we are acting for the daughter of Estrella de Guzman, and that Adelbron is working her same old bag of tricks—murder, blackmail and all the rest of it."

"Ah!" Manara straightened up. "There was a child? A daughter, Estrella's daughter; and Adelbron tries to trap her too? You must finish that woman, you must let nothing stand in your way.



I will pray night and day for your success." There was a hard, vendetta sparkle in his deep-set, Castilian eyes, but it flickered out. "But I cannot swear to any of this. The only person who could legally establish the facts is Primo, and he has taken the vow of silence."

He was so stirred by his memories, so interested in Sara that he might have gone on talking indefinitely, if we had not made the excuse of business and left. I was on fire to get to Sara, and tell her of her newly discovered relative, and his story. Manara accompanied us to the sidewalk with many expressions of good-will, and I called a taxicab and told the driver to lose no time in getting us up town.

"Let down the window," Curran said as we started off, "I want to get the smell of cheese and garlic off my clothes."

I hastened to comply with this request for my own sake.

"We've got it now, Dandridge, motive and everything established; but those infernal alibis worry me. I can't believe that doctor isn't telling the truth, but——"

"Tell me," I asked, "if necessary, would the Church permit Primo to testify?"

"In so important a case, a matter of life and

death, yes," he said, and relapsed into silence. I had plenty to think of myself and was glad enough that he had no wish to talk.

It was at Fifty-ninth Street that we were stopped for a few moments by the cross-town traffic, our cab in a press of other vehicles; but at last the yellow go-ahead signal flashed on and we started.

Just then I leaned forward to tell the driver that we might make better time on Park Avenue, and as I did so, I heard something whizz past my ear.

Involuntarily I turned, and saw sticking in the side of Curran's upturned, heavy overcoat collar a slender sliver of bamboo. The *Fer de Lance* had struck again.

## CHAPTER XVIII

I REACHED out and jerked the dart from Curran's collar. Later, when I had time to think about it, I was thankful that I had on my gloves.

"Don't be frightened," I said, "it pierced one fold of your collar and was embedded in another. It couldn't possibly have scratched the skin."

He stared down at the tiny arrow in my hand, which I noticed was none too steady.

"My God!" he said, "it was meant for you. If it had been me, they would have aimed from this side of the cab. Of course you didn't see the car it came from?"

He didn't wait for my answer, but pushed aside the front window, and gave the driver the address of Adelbron's apartment.

"And to hell with traffic regulations! I'm Inspector Curran. Get me there."

The fellow, quick-witted, an expert, swung smartly around, shot through the moving lines of vehicles and whirled us into the Park.

"We'll smash the lady's alibi this time, I'm thinking" Curran muttered. "She'll head for home of course, but we ought to beat her there. And if it isn't she, why haven't those dumb-bells of mine caught on to her understudy?"

Rattling under the pillars of the elevator, we skidded into the cross-street and drew up before the apartment house. Inside, we did not wait for the elevator, but ran up the stairs and rapped sharply on the door.

It opened a crack, secured on the inside by a chain, and showed the startled face of the French maid.

"Inspector of the police." Curran thrust the fact upon her at once. "Open the door. I want to see Madame Adelbron."

She slipped the chain, and frightened but voluble, explained that Madame was in communion with her spiritual guides and could not be disturbed. If the gentlemen would wait a few minutes in the reception room——?

Curran had pushed past her, his hand was already on the knob of the inner door of the vestibule, when she clung to his arm.

"To rouse Madame suddenly from her trance might have consequences the most serious. If

M'sieur insists, I will show him Madame, but I beseech you, do not wake her."

She scurried ahead of us through what was apparently a drawing room, and paused before a door which led into the room beyond. Then, with finger to her lips, she softly opened it.

"See," she whispered, pointing, "Madame."

With her favorite, purple velvet billowing about her, the medium lay back in her chair asleep or, as the maid claimed, in a trance. Her broad, dark face, with its thick nostrils and flabby rolls of flesh was turned toward us, slightly, and it was unmistakable.

The light in the room was shaded by colored globes, and obscured by a fog of incense, but still strong enough to leave no doubt that it was Adelbron and none other.

Curran frowned, disappointed and nonplussed, and took a step forward into the room. But at that moment, the sleeping woman began to move. Her shoulders writhed as if in pain, her chest heaved convulsively, her head rolled from side to side.

"She feels an alien presence," the maid quavered, "*Allons, messieurs!* I beg of you. It might mean death if she were to awaken now."

Her terror was so real that we fell back, and she

gently drew the door to. Curran and I stood there, feeling a little guilty.

"She beat us to it, somehow," he muttered. "Come on, Dandridge."

"You will not wait and see Madame then?" asked the maid deferentially.

"No." Curran was curt, an indication with him of bad temper, and we left the apartment.

Down stairs he stopped to speak to the elevator boy.

"Any seven room apartments vacant?"

"No, sir; only fours and fives."

The Inspector told our cab driver to take us to the nearest drug store, he wanted to telephone; and, as we started off he gave a quick nod as if some idea he held had been confirmed.

"No seven room apartments," he said. "But that house dates from the days when they built nothing else; and so must have recently been all cut up and rearranged. That means corners and cubby holes that were not in the original plan, and which might provide an exit or an entrance that we know nothing about. Some one is shooting these poison darts. Who? If not Adelbron herself, it must be a confederate. And how, watched as she is, does she communicate with a confederate?"

The cab had stopped before the drug store, and as we crossed the sidewalk, Curran explained his anxiety to get to the nearest telephone booth.

"I am going to call up Ben, and tell him to comb over that place immediately and see what he can find out."

"And while you are at that," I said, "I will call up Miss Fosdick and also Graham Smith. These recent developments seem to call for a conference, don't you think?"

When I came out of the booth, Curran was standing in the door looking up and down the street.

"Nothing suspicious in sight," he caught me by the arm and hurried me to the cab, taking the precaution after we were inside of pulling down the shades.

"Get Smith?" he asked as we proceeded up town.

"Yes; he may be detained a bit, but he will be there, and Miss Fosdick says that since it is so late, we must all dine with her. Lord Harry, she says, is already at the house."

"Well, I'm not above taking assistance from anyone," Curran remarked philosophically. "And when a crook is working on the level with you, his advice is usually worth something; more," pointedly, "than that of some amateur detective reporter."



"Don't carp at Graham, it's not worthy of you. And he has some sort of a plan for catching Adelbron simmering in his head. It may have come to the boil by this time, and you might find something in it. Who knows!"

And just before we reached the house I got his reluctant promise to say nothing of the dart which had been shot at me, and had barely missed him.

As I held Sara's hand for a too brief moment, my heart gave a quick throb of gratitude that I was still in the same world with her. Curran, Lord Harry, Miss Mouse, all gathered about us, were as shadows. She was the one vivid reality.

I let Curran tell the story of our trip to Beaver Street, content to watch her as she listened, to see her eyes widen, her lips part; to hear her eager questions. She was tremendously interested in Juan Manara and her Spanish relatives, but they became mere details to her as she hung breathless on Curran's words while he told of the part Adelbron had played in her family affairs.

"My Spanish grandfather was a fool to let her go," she said. "Grand would never had done it. I know now why he never mentioned Don Eugenio to me, although he was in communication with them. He thought I might take a whim to go over there,

and he didn't want me to get into such a futile, depressing atmosphere. Grand hated gloom."

Before we got any further, dinner was announced, and we went into the dining room. There, as on the night before, Lord Harry took command of the situation. It was his tact and humor which prevented us from being a silent gathering.

Presently Graham Smith came in, and I suddenly remembered that I had failed, when telephoning him, to warn him not to mention the attack on Curran and myself, so now I desperately tried to catch his eye and signal him to keep mum.

But as he came forward in his penguin fashion to speak to Sara, he was looking everywhere except in my direction, and even when he slid into his chair and unfolded his napkin, I couldn't catch his eye.

It wasn't any time though before he swung his solemn gaze around to Curran and me.

"You gave me an awful jolt this afternoon Tony. Just think Miss Fosdick of that dart barely missing him, and if the Inspector hadn't turned up the collar of his coat—whew!"

Sara's face was as white as chalk; for the first time I saw terror in her eyes.

"Anthony!" her voice was a fluttering whisper; "she struck at you—today! Why didn't you tell

me?" she turned on Curran like a tigress. "How dared you not tell me?" But before he could answer her eyes held mine again, such depths in them as I had never dreamed of. "And I," she said, "have let you in for this. Oh, Anthony!"

Lord Harry leaned swiftly toward her.

"We've all finished," he murmured. "Don't you think we had better talk it out in the library?"

She rose at once, and Miss Mouse gave a hasty order to Pardy to serve coffee there at once, and followed her, putting an arm about her. Sara shook it off, she disdained any appearance of weakness. But I saw that her lips were still white as she sank into a low chair before the fire.

The secretary poured the coffee, and Sara, taking the cup I handed to her, drank it off.

"Now," she said, "I want to hear from you, Inspector Curran, exactly what happened this afternoon."

He told her the facts in his succinct way, ending with a more elaborate description of our visit to Adelbron's apartment.

"I would have sworn we had her cornered," he said, "and I leave it to Dandridge if any time was lost; yet there she was. I saw her with my own eyes."

"But with all this new evidence about her past, can't—?" Miss Mouse began.

"Evidence!" Curran spoke bitterly. "That isn't evidence, Miss O'Connor; it's old man's chatter. We are not after Adelbron for what happened in Spain twenty years ago. And no matter what she's done or what her reputation is, you can't convict a woman of murder or attempted murder, when she can prove that at the moment of the crime she was at home in her own apartment."

Sara sat upright, as he finished, and old Jerome's eyes were not more steely and acute than hers at that moment.

"Rot!" she cried imperiously. "It isn't a question of what can be done or what can't. It's what's going to be done. Mr. Smith," turning to Graham. "It was said before you came in that you had a plan of some kind for trapping this woman. What is it?"

Graham blinked once or twice at the suddenness of the question, not yet accustomed to Sara's fashion of going straight to the point.

"I did have a sort of a plan," for once I saw Graham slightly embarrassed. "It's pretty vague yet though, and I suppose Dandridge will want to break my neck since, in a way, it involves you. I remem-

bered that you, Miss Fosdick, are the only person that has scored against Adelbron so far, and you certainly did that when you got her goat as the masked crystal-gazer."

He was perfectly right when he said that I would want to break his neck. I longed to make a clean job of it at that moment.

"You're crazy, Graham," I told him as calmly as I could. "Don't try to stage anything like that again. You might as well propose sending Miss Fosdick into the den of a hungry tiger."

"He hasn't proposed anything yet," Sara remarked coolly lifting her arched black brows. My heart sank; the adventurous gleam I dreaded was beginning to sparkle in her eyes.

"And Mr. Dandridge," reprovingly, "it will certainly do no harm to listen to Mr. Smith's ideas. Even if we do not follow them we may find something that will serve as a basis for another plan. Go on, please, Mr. Smith."

It was sickening the way Graham puffed up. Sara had foolishly flattered that inordinate conceit of his.

"I worked the thing out psychologically," he said, "at least as far as I got with it. Fortune tellers, and I've known a good many of them, are the most superstitious people in the world. Fakers though

they are, they had some psychic quality to start with, so they're always prepared to believe that the next pretender has, maybe, some miraculous powers. Just as gamblers go up against the game of another of their kind, so these charlatans are always ready to fall for some new wizard of the occult.

"Now, after hearing of that stunt of Miss Fossdick's at the Charity Bazaar, and the storm Adelbron stirred up about it, it struck me that it might be a good plan to bring them together again. It could easily be framed. I could tell her that the unusual psychic powers of the crystal-gazer had aroused such a lot of interest and comment, that my paper wished to arrange a test séance, and have the great and justly famous Madame Adelbron present to detect anything in the way of fraud. That would not only flatter her, you see, but also give her a chance for revenge.

"You told me," he looked at me, "that Adelbron believed it was some rival of hers, she called Valerine, who was there to do her dirt, and the old girl was so furious that she was ready to kill the masked lady, in fact she tried to. Well, don't you see how she would jump at this chance? She knows Valerine is a faker, and that she could easily catch her at her tricks. What's the result? Lovely pub-

licity for the true psychic who exposes the false. Valerine in the soup; Adelbron on a pedestal."

"Fine!" Curran said dryly. "But how does it help us get Adelbron?"

"That's what I'm coming to," Smith replied with dignity. "I was thinking that if we could get some one, maybe two or three, to make up as former victims of hers, and come out of the cabinet in the dim light they have, Madame might have such a fit that, in the hands of a clever worker like Miss Fosdick she would come through with all that's on her soul."

Sara's curiously concentrated gaze was fixed on Graham. I had seen that look before; I knew its portent. Her mind was working on this mad plan of his, or some modification of it, and when that happened, she invariably translated thought into action.

A dead weight settled about my heart. I remembered that night of the Bazaar; Adelbron's face, the gleam of steel in her hand. I thought of poisoned darts hurled through the darkness. And I was responsible for this. I cursed the insane impulse which had driven me to confide in Graham Smith. This plan of his was an inspiration of the Devil.

"Nothing to that sort of fantastic stuff," said



Curran to my infinite relief, giving Smith a contemptuous and angry glance.

"Why not?" There was a touch of the old insolence in Sara's voice.

"Silly, and dangerous too, for you. Suppose we do corner that woman. You don't suppose she'll give in without a fight, do you?"

"According to you, Inspector, I'm in danger every minute, and what happened this afternoon shows that you and Mr. Dandridge are too," Sara retorted. "And even if the danger were twice as great as it is, I'd take the risk. You admit you can't arrest her on the evidence, and she's got to be stopped now. Even if this idea doesn't work out, and we are made to look like fools, it's worth trying. Anything's worth trying, in the hole that we are in. How soon," to Smith, "do you think you can arrange that séance?"

He looked unhappily from Curran to me.

"It will take a good deal of time, I'm afraid. We'll have to have descriptions and likenesses of the people we want impersonated. I guess Inspector Curran is right, Miss Fosdick; it is an impracticable scheme."

Sara threw out her hand impatiently. "One impersonation will be enough," she said crisply, "and

the most effective will be that of Eugenio de Guzman y Manara. His photograph is there on the table."

"Y-es," Smith wilted still more, "but we'll need a mighty capable actor to take the part. Adelbron isn't easy to fool."

"We have the actor right here," Sara motioned toward Lord Harry. "Now, Mr. Smith, please don't spend any more time trying to think up obstacles, but get Madame Adelbron, and see what is the earliest date she will set for the séance. And don't come back here after you have seen her. You might be followed, and we must keep her from suspecting anything." Sara, as usual thought of everything. "You can let us know what she says through Mr. Curran's assistant."

So Graham went on his errand, a little dejected still over the opposition from Curran and myself, but nevertheless pleased that it was his idea Sara had accepted, while rejecting our advice.

We sat there for perhaps an hour, discussing the situation, and intermittently pleading with Sara to give up this wild project, and then Pardy appeared to say that some one wished to see Mr. Curran.

Curran went out, but returned in a few minutes.

"It was Ben," he said grimly, "and darn it all,

that fool Smith has fixed it for tomorrow night at eight o'clock and to prevent the possibility of fraud, Adelbron stipulates that it must be held in her apartment."

"Fine!" Sara exclaimed. "I could not have asked anything better."

"Tomorrow night!" Lord Harry laid down the photograph of de Guzman he had been studying. "That means I shall have to depend on greasepaint and make-up. If only I had time to have one of those French portrait-masks made. Most effective you know, and——"

But Sara was on her feet, her hands clasping and unclasping.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!" And then as she ran toward the door. "Wait, wait a moment," and vanished.

We looked at each other in amazement, wondering what she could have remembered that accounted for this sudden excitement and her rapid disappearance, when she returned, almost as quickly as she had gone. She carried an envelope in her hand, and this she gave to Lord Harry.

"What do you make of that?" she asked, and then turned to Curran and myself before he could answer.

"Was Adelbron's face convulsed when you saw

her twitching and writhing in her trance this afternoon?"

I was the first to answer, and Curran soon confirmed me.

"No, I noticed that it remained calm, and wondered at it at the time."

"That settles it!" her voice rang triumphantly. "And that explains her alibis. You remember, Inspector, that fragment which your Miss Ray found in the ashes of the fireplace, and which none of us could make anything of? We thought it might be a portrait painted on some very thin, delicate composition, and it was; it was! A portrait mask of herself. Mr. O'Connor, it must be that, it can't be anything else. Say it is!"

Lord Harry put down the reading glass through which he had been examining the bit.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he said. "This one must have been damaged in some way and she burned it, but she had another, or others."

"And that is how she fooled us," Curran said grimly. "The Doctor who found her asleep, the women at her séance, even you, Dandridge, and myself. While she was out on her mur—" he looked quickly at Sara, "on those occasions, she had a woman at home made up to represent her and wear-

ing one of those life-like masks. I didn't know they could make things like that."

He held out his hand to Sara.

"Miss Fosdick, I take off my hat to you. I only wish I had you on my staff. Well, believe me, the next time the lady starts out——"

"There won't be a next time," Sara interrupted. "We are going to act too quickly for that."

"I've been wondering why Miss Ray didn't find that duplicate mask the woman wore to-day," Curran said. "But Adelbron would be too shrewd to have them about her place; the double must have kept them for her. Well, I want to think it all over, to make sure that it all gees and that we're not off on the wrong tack. Why," looking at his watch, "I had no idea it was so late. I must see Ben and hear what he has to say about that apartment house."

Lord Harry got up to accompany him, and I too rose.

"Wait," whispered Sara, with a light touch on my arm, "I must speak to you."

## CHAPTER XIX

MISS MOUSE had left the room with the two men; the door closed behind them, and Sara and I were alone.

"My dear, my dear! And I nearly lost you!" her hands were clutching my arms, "I thought——"

Her words were smothered, silenced against my heart.

When I lifted my head the whole world had changed. Even the room, with its book-lined walls, the firelight flickering over the massive furniture, seemed different from the one in which Sara and I had stood facing each other only the night before.

Then it had been swept by the fighting spirit of old Jerome Fosdick, but tonight it was a garden of moonlight and spring. Outside there were icy streets and winter winds; here there was April, the breath of daffodils and lilacs.

Sara's eyes were dark and luminous as she lifted them to mine, and infinitely sweet. The same glow, perhaps, holding the romance and passion of old

Spain that Allan Fosdick had seen in the eyes of Estrella de Guzman.

No need of words between us. They may have been spoken. I do not know. It is only on the stage or in novels that emotion voices itself. In real life, the throat is choked, the lips dumb with the surge of feeling.

So whatever may have been said has left no impression on my memory. I only know that I had her in my arms, my lips to hers. Moments passed uncounted as we clung together—how long, how short, I cannot say—brief as the glint of light upon a breaking wave, yet a whole lifetime of sensation. Time for us had stopped; the world had narrowed down to just us two. I came back from paradise to find myself murmuring over and over again:

“I love you, I love you.”

A fool named Anthony Dandridge had once argued that it would be the height of folly, a death-blow to his career, to think of marrying a girl with the excessive fortune of Sara Fosdick. I could have laughed now at the recollection. Her riches or lack of them meant nothing. She was my other self; her kisses were wine to my spirit, her touch thrilled me to achievement. With her as a stimulus, I felt that there were no worlds I could not con-



quer. Each day would be a fresh adventure, every hour a new romance.

"I love you," she whispered, her cheek against mine.

"Since when?"

"Always, I think. But there was so much to think about, so much to do, that it never swept me off my feet until tonight. Your danger!" She shuddered in my arms.

Danger! The word stabbed me for it recalled to my mind the reckless adventure on which she was bent. Perhaps now though, she would listen to me. I used every argument in my power, I begged her to give it up, and she would not listen.

"I'll do anything else in the world you ask me, Tony, but not that, not now. If Adelbron wants you out of the way, she won't stop with one attempt; and you know I'll be well looked after tomorrow night, and so dearest, it's no use saying another word about it."

I stopped arguing about it; it was no use, but my yielding was only apparent and temporary; I realized that if I was to evolve any plan to balk this cursed scheme of Graham Smith's, I must get away from her, to my own rooms, where her intoxicating presence did not muddle and confuse the exercise of

my faculties. It was impossible to think clearly with the spell of her voice in my ears, the spell of her beauty in my eyes, the spell of her nearness and charm upon me.

But when I suggested going, her fears for me revived. More than once she held me back as I started for the door, and she was only slightly reassured when she found that two detectives were waiting outside, detailed by Curran to accompany me wherever I went. They rode home with me in the cab, and insisted on searching my apartment and making sure of all doors and windows. These measures for my protection instead of comforting me, increased my fears for Sara. They emphasized the menace of the situation in which she was placing herself.

When I was free of my body guard, and had telephoned Sara telling her that I was safe in my own walls, I sat down determined to find some answer to my problem.

The irony of life! Here was I who should be tingling with triumph, wrapped in ecstatic dreams, the happiest man in the world, tortured with a cold fear, a prescience, something that I could not shake off.

My heart was like ice at the thought of that

séance. I dared not consider the possibilities of it, and yet they kept presenting themselves to my mind. Sara baiting the implacable *Fer de Lance*. Adelbron, desperate, and striking through the darkness. I must find some way to prevent that meeting.

I racked my brain but the effective expedient still eluded me. Then I ran back over all the phases of the case in the hope of picking up some clue to help me—the murder of Fosdick, the robbery of the safe, the death of Herbert, Juan Manara's story, the "Missionary," Miss Mouse, Lord Harry, Atchison ——?

Atchison! I couldn't get away from the idea that through him, I might accomplish something; it persisted so strongly that finally I decided to follow its leading. It meant that I would have to pit myself in a game of bluff against Atchison, the master of bluff. I didn't like it, but it was the one road open to me.

My temples were throbbing, and my muscles were cramped when I got up from my chair, but as I stumbled off to bed, I knew that I should sleep. I had at last a definite course to follow.

The next morning, I called up Graham Smith, and told him that I wanted to see him at my office at once.

"Oh, I say, Tony," his sleepy voice protested. "Have a heart. This is hours ahead of my getting up time, and I have a hard day's work in front of me. There are a dozen things to see to in preparation for the big stunt tonight."

"This is the most important thing you've got on hand." I said firmly. "Be at this office in half an hour."

I had wisely played on his curiosity, so it was no surprise when he walked in within a reasonable time.

"Is there any subject," I asked, "that you can interview Atchison on, without having it seem a mere pretext?"

"Why, yes," he said after a moment's thought. "There are some new developments in the Joan Baird strangling case which throw the advantage rather to his side. It would be only natural to find out if he has anything to say."

"Go to it," I said. "Then ask him if there is any news in this. Say that there is a story out that I was shot in a taxicab last night, I refuse either to deny or confirm it, and the police are not talking, but I was in consultation with Curran this morning, and one of the reporters heard me say as I came away, 'Since you've traced up the delivery of the

letters to Atchison, Inspector—' and then we dropped our voices and the man didn't get the rest of it."

"All right," said Graham with no great enthusiasm. "But where does that get you?"

"I'm not quite sure," I replied. "But I expect it to get me either a call from Atchison or an invitation to take luncheon with him today."

I was not mistaken, and this fact bucked up my self confidence tremendously. Shortly before noon, Atchison called me up and asked me to take luncheon with him at two o'clock. He was sorry to make it so late, but it would be impossible for him to leave the office before that time.

"*Touche!*" I murmured, as I hung up the receiver. I had him guessing. Only a small victory, but it was heartening.

There was no hint of anxiety though in his cordial, easy manner, as he came to meet me when I entered the down town restaurant he had selected. Yet there was a difference in the quality of his cordiality today from that which he had shown me when I dined with him. He discriminated nicely between the two occasions. At the former one he had extended the hospitality of his home to a friend. Now he was meeting me at a public place

during business hours and for the discussion of a matter of business.

Then he had shown his hand incidentally and after dinner was over; now he spent no time in extraneous conversation.

"I'm sorry, Dandridge," he said as soon as we had given our orders, "but I am afraid that when I told you the other night to take all the time you thought necessary on this Fosdick matter, I spoke outside the book—meaning thereby without reference to my client. A rather bulky tome, eh?" He chuckled in humorous appreciation of his joke. "As it happens, Madame Adelbron is insisting upon immediate action; so I shall have to ask you to have your experts examine the receipt which forms the basis of our claim without delay."

"We don't require an examination," I said gently, and had the pleasure of seeing his eyes open a fraction wider. "We know that the document in question is a forgery, the handiwork of the dead museum curator, Herbert, alias Haworth. Also, I don't mind telling you Mr. Atchison that we have the full details of Madame Adelbron's connection with the family of General de Guzman y Manara of Madrid, including the outrageous imposition she practised when she palmed off a street girl as the daughter,

Estrella, who at the time was the wife of Allan Fosdick, and living in Buenos Ayres."

I felt that he was surprised, but he covered any appearance of it with a slight, satirical smile.

"Yes, I have heard that story," he nodded. "Hardly to be wondered at, I suppose, that a proud, old Spanish family should try to save its face with a legend of the sort. But unfortunately for your side it lacks substantiation."

"I fancy we shall prove it easily enough," I said. He lifted his brows.

"You intend to fight then?"

"What else can we do? This alleged claim is a blackmailing scheme, the woman who presents it is notorious through the purlieus of Europe under the significant name of *Fer de Lance*. You don't expect me to counsel Miss Fosdick to submit to such extortion, do you?"

He had laid down his knife and fork, and was looking down at his plate. When he spoke it was in a tone of sincere regret.

"I was afraid of this," he said. "You may remember Dandridge that when we talked before, I spoke of the moral rigidity of youth. It is only as we grow older that we learn to bend a little and yield gracefully to the force of circumstances. Now



I am really in a pitiable situation in this case," again that engaging, humorous quirk to the mouth. "My sympathy is all with you and Miss Fosdick, and yet I am bound of course to the interests of my client. Such a client!" He rolled up his eyes so comically that I could not help laughing.

"Believe me, Dandridge, I am quite willing to credit anything you may have heard about her. As I have already told you, I haven't the faintest doubt that she is an adventuress, very probably a black-mailer, or anything else you choose. Also it is possible that this receipt is a forgery, although it has been pronounced genuine by some of the best men in the country.

"But what of all that? If my client instructs me to bring suit—and she has done so—what else can I do? And the moment the papers are filed, a flood of scandal is let loose. The newspapers will \_\_\_\_\_."

"Oh, if you are going to try the case in the newspapers," I interrupted, "I don't think we will suffer greatly. We have enough ammunition on hand to discredit Madame Adelbron pretty effectually."

"To discredit her, previous to the trial, perhaps," he assented. "Although it will not do Miss Fosdick much good to be made the subject of such a contro-

versy. And how about the boomerang when the matter comes to court, and you fail to justify your derogatory statements? You can't prove that this document is forged, Dandridge; nor can you bring a single witness to prove that Estrella Fosdick was not the thieves' 'moll' and cantina dancer that Adelbron claims."

"How about her brother, Primo de Guzman?" I steadied my face as I shot my first bluff at him.

"Her brother? Surely you must know that he is buried in some monastery under the vow of silence, and those vows are unbreakable."

"We already," I said, "have assurance from the highest quarter that a dispensation will be granted permitting him to testify."

"But that," he said quickly, "is only done in cases of life and death, where the innocent are in danger of suffering for the guilty."

"Exactly." I returned significantly.

For the first time he veered from the character he had assumed—the kindly, experienced veteran of the bar seeking to restrain an impulsive junior. His heavy brows drew down, I caught the momentary but dark hostility of his glance.

"We are arguing all about the point, Dandridge," he was as ingratiating as ever. "You may have

noticed that it is always the side issues that provoke dispute. Hold to the main contention, and men can almost invariably reach an agreement. Now the question here is very simple. Suppose we grant that Adelbron is as black as you paint her, that this receipt of hers is a forgery, and her demand for money, blackmail; and further, suppose you were able to establish these facts by incontrovertible evidence?" His ironical tone challenged the possibility of such a thing. "Still what do you gain?"

"That is the question I want you to ask yourself, my dear fellow." He was grave, almost fatherly now. "This woman is determined to sue; it is impossible to argue with or control her. Even if I were to withdraw from the case, some other attorney would undertake it. Proceedings are certain, and with proceedings—publicity. Rebut it by proofs as strong as Holy Writ, win a dozen verdicts against us if you choose; and still the nasty story lingers in men's minds. Sara Fosdick is inevitably tarnished, smirched. Every thing she does, and she cannot escape attracting attention, recalls the dirty scandal; and evokes sly winks, whispered innuendos.

"That radiant, proud girl," his voice trembled with feeling, "gossip-branded as the daughter of a prostitute and a thief. Can she afford to risk it,

Dandridge? Can you counsel her to do so? For what is to her a small sum—" he paused as if recollecting the amount. "Something over three hundred thousand, is it not?"

The claim with interest and the added value of the jewels would be considerably more, but I did not correct him.

"Too high." I said. "Especially as Miss Fosdick and I realize that this would be only the opening wedge for more demands. We intend to fight it out now, and be done with it."

"Be done with it!" His pitying smile pictured the futility of such a course. "And really, my boy, don't you think your apprehension of further demands is exaggerated? If this receipt of Madame Adelbron's were delivered to you——"

"And our stolen Spanish correspondence with it?" I asked.

I was looking at him squarely, but he did not turn a hair.

"I know nothing of that, but if there is anything of the sort, and my client has it, I shall certainly insist that it be returned. A sworn admission by Madame Adelbron covering the points you wish established would, however, probably serve your purpose just as well."

He was conceding heavily, but I still felt that he had not reached his limit, so I gave another turn to the screw.

"Mr. Atchison," I crushed out the cigarette I had been smoking, and leaned my elbows on the table, "we are both practical men. Also, as you say, Miss Fosdick is a very wealthy woman. So a compromise in this case, of course with guarantees attached to preclude her from further annoyance, would be to her advantage. But the figure you name is ridiculous. This bogie of publicity you dangle doesn't seem very frightful to us, when we have such a card as Primo de Guzman to offset it."

I let that sink in, and went on.

"You can't spring anything that will equal the sensation or get so much newspaper space as that. A Trappist monk leaves his seclusion, and breaks his vow of silence to overwhelm the slanderers of his dead sister. No, no; I shall certainly never advise Miss Fosdick to pay three hundred thousand or anything approaching it for such an empty bargain."

Atchison was looking down at the tip of his cigarette.

"I am beginning to suspect," he said half jocularly, half in earnest, "that the size of your fee is

regulated by the amount you can cut down this claim.

"However," with a fine effect of impulsive liberality, "I am not going to haggle. I will try to persuade Adelbron, and I think I can do so, to accept the exact amount of which she claims to have been defrauded, twenty-five thousand pounds sterling, with no mention of either the jewels or interest. Could anything be fairer than that?"

I shook my head.

He gave an angry jerk to his chair. "Name your own terms then," he said shortly. "Perhaps we can reach an agreement. How much will you give?"

It was poker now; the outcome depended on the steadiness of my face and voice and nerve. He would detect the slightest wavering.

"How much will we give?" I repeated, never dropping my eyes from his. "Not one cent, Mr. Atchison. My instructions from Miss Fosdick were to fight this claim until hell freezes over. And not only this, but to secure the indictment of Madame Adelbron, and every other person in this conspiracy, note that please, for the murder of Jerome Fosdick."

"Murder of Jerome Fosdick!" His affectation

of surprise, if it was an affectation, was perfect. "What do you mean, Dandridge? Jerome Fosdick died in his car from an—er—stroke or something of the kind."

"A stroke, yes," I said. "The stroke of the *Fer de Lance*, your client and accomplice."

His broad face was purpling as he thrust it close to mine.

"Accomplice! You are going too far, young man. You must be insane with these wild accusations of murder. Why, there isn't a scintilla of evidence to support them."

"Do you think so?" I shrugged, my face as impassive as an old-time faro dealer's—odd how an emergency calls out unsuspected capabilities. "Don't get excited. As you said awhile ago, we still may reach an agreement."

He looked at me contemptuously, but waited. I had him on the defensive now.

"I am not going to take time detailing the evidence we have against Adelbron. You know just how guilty she is, and you can take it from me, her conviction is certain. But that is not the question I want to discuss. What interests me more is your position in this affair. My instructions are to proceed against every one associated in the conspiracy; but——"



"You insolent fool!" he half rose from his seat, "How dare you use such language to me?"

"Because," I answered, "of the language you used to me the other night in front of the Scarabeus club. You made a bad blunder then, shrewd as you are. Your words—which I have taken the precaution to quote in a deposition attested by both my taxi driver and myself—can bear but one interpretation; that you had been associated with the forger, Haworth, in securing the de Guzman correspondence from Mr. Fosdick's safe, and were angry with him for losing the signed photograph of General de Guzman. In short you were in a conspiracy to defraud Sara Fosdick, and therefore, by inference, an accessory to the murder of Jerome Fosdick, and also that of Haworth. I don't really believe that you knew that either event was planned, but they were the outcome of the conspiracy to defraud, and you know that you will be held, legally, as guilty as Adelbron."

His eyes never wavered from mine, but he said nothing.

"That information is mine alone," I went on, "to use or not to use as I see fit. For reasons of my own, I would prefer not to use it. If this suit against Miss Fosdick is dropped, and the forged

receipt and Spanish correspondence delivered to us, it will be forgotten."

"And all criminal proceedings dropped of course?" he said in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone. He might have been speaking of an affair in no way related to himself.

"Hardly," I said. "I don't propose to leave a vicious wild-cat like Adelbron at large to shoot one of her little darts at me whenever she is inclined. I shall move for her indictment tomorrow. But, may I suggest,—I wonder if I am compounding a felony—that a steamer sails for Honduras at seven o'clock tonight. As long as she stays there, she is safe from extradition, but the moment she sets foot outside, she will be arrested and brought back here for trial."

He glanced at his watch.

"Is it possible? Twenty minutes to five." I could not believe it myself until I looked at my own watch, "You are a wonderful companion, Dandridge. I always forget time when I am with you. We have been sitting here almost three hours.

"However," as he summoned the waiter and paid the check, "I must hurry now. There is scant time to arrange for my client's sailing."

He rose with his usual courtly bow, and, his gray

head held high, moved swiftly from the restaurant. I wanted to bring my hands together in soundless applause. I had won, but he had carried off defeat magnificently; had fought to the last ditch and then accepted punishment without a whine or a murmur.

And mingled with my enormous relief was a feeling of incredulity. Had I really tilted with the most knowing old fox in the game and bluffed him to a stand-still? Yet "bluffed" was rather an extreme way of putting it. I had merely used the facts to the best advantage. I could never have done it except for Sara, to save her. Atchison was too formidable an adversary to face in cold blood.

But she *was* saved. I was lifted on a great wave of exultation at that thought. There was no need now for her to meet Adelbron, no need for her to know of this conversation. I would simply tell her that the woman had taken fright, and unexpectedly left town, and was now beyond our reach.

I went to the telephone and called up the house. Miss Mouse answered.

"Why, Mr. Dandridge, didn't you know?" she said, "Miss Fosdick tried to telephone you this afternoon, but couldn't reach you. For some reason, Madame Adelbron changed the hour of the test from eight this evening to five this afternoon,

and Miss Fosdick has already gone to keep the appointment."

For a moment the walls slid past my eyes, seas seemed to be roaring in my ears. Somewhere outside a clock struck five. Sara was now in Adelson's apartment.

## CHAPTER XX

THE impulse toward immediate action was so strong that I was half way out when the check-boy called me, and I turned back, automatically reaching in my pocket for a coin. I caught my hat and coat from him, and was still struggling into the sleeves of my coat when I reached the sidewalk.

There I stopped short and forced myself to think deliberately. This was no time to be running around in circles. Hot haste was a poor substitute for a cool brain. A cab driver seeing me standing there drew up to the curb expectantly, but I shook my head. I could make better time in the subway, and fortunately there was a station only a block away.

It was in the thick of the evening rush, but I managed to wedge my way aboard a crowded up-town train; where, clinging to a strap I scowled over the delay of every stop, and cursed the slowness of the incoming and offgoing passengers.

After we reached my station, it didn't take me long

to get to Adelbron's apartment, but three times I pushed the bell before it was answered, and then the narrow face of the French maid peeped through the chained slit. She recognized me immediately as the companion of Curran on his visit the afternoon before, and her face grew more forbidding than ever.

"Madame can not be seen. She has a séance."

"I know." I tried to push a bill into her hand; she ignored it. "But will you ask Mr. Smith to step to the door. I have an important message for him. He is expecting me."

She sniffed scornfully and was about to close the door in my face, when she must have been stopped by someone inside for she appeared to be listening, although I heard no voice. Then ceasing her efforts to bar me out, she drew back the chain-bolt.

"*Entre donc, M'sieu.*" She stood aside for me, but I was hardly over the threshold before she closed the door, shot the bolt, and was again in front of me. As on my former visit, she led the way across the reception room, now almost in darkness, and stopped before the curtained doorway on the further side, raising her finger to her lip, with the same cautioning gesture she had used the day before.

As she drew aside the hanging, I could see a sub-

duced light in the room beyond, and by it the dim outlines of several persons sitting in a sort of circle. The séance had begun.

At first I could see very little, but as I stood there my eyes gradually became accustomed to the faint glow, and I was able to make out the figures of Graham Smith and two of Curran's detectives, who had been introduced by Smith as fellow reporters. There were three other men who were strangers to me but I supposed they had been selected by Adelbron.

In a large chair facing them Sara sat, in the same black gown, black turban and mask she had worn at the Charity Bazaar. Adelbron in yellow, her gross bulk distinguishable even in the shadows about her, sat watching Sara like some great, malevolent spider.

I learned afterward that the séance had been in progress about ten minutes when I arrived. The shift in the hour for it had been made as late as three o'clock that afternoon, when Adelbron, with what seemed a temperamental impulse, but which was probably a deliberate design to rattle and discompose the crystal-gazer, had informed Graham Smith that the test must be held at five o'clock or not at all.

He communicated this to Sara, and after talking



to Lord Harry—neither Curran nor myself could be reached—she told Graham to advise Adelbron that she would meet the changed conditions.

If she had felt any nervousness or uncertainty, she gave no evidence of it now. Her head lay against the back of the chair; her hands, black gloved, rested composedly on the arms; her voice, she was speaking in a deep, slow tone, was even.

Her mythical control was speaking through her, and she was describing in detail—sometimes in Spanish, which she spoke fluently, and sometimes in English—the life of Adelbron in the home of General de Guzman. I knew that she and Lord Harry had intended calling on Juan Manara that morning to hear his story first hand, and get all the additional points they could. But no one would have dreamed that it was a prearranged or rehearsed performance, so faultlessly did she give the impression of being a mere inert vehicle for a spirit voice.

I glanced again toward Adelbron, and my eye fell on a chair in the circle which was so near me that all I had to do was slip in and take it. I made a step forward, but before I could take another I was seized from behind, my arms held down, and a gag slipped into my mouth.

It happened with such lightning suddenness, it

was so unexpected that before I could struggle or make a sound I was helpless. As I was jerked backward from the doorway, the curtain fell before it, and any one in the audience who might have been looking in that direction would not have seen enough in the surrounding darkness to comment on it. Then too, the attention of the spectators was concentrated on Sara, and any gurgling or groaning I may have done would be attributed to the maid, suffering from a temporary choking spell, or the cat having a fit.

Away from the doorway they tied me up securely, and then, under the whispered directions of the maid, placed me in a closet at one side of the reception room and shut me in.

They hadn't done for me. That was a relief; and before Adelbron could carry out any plans she had for me, I was pretty sure she would be taken. Either Graham Smith or Lord Harry would have left word at Curran's office of the change in the hour of the séance, and surely by this time, they would have the house surrounded. And whether they missed me or not, I knew that Curran would have that apartment searched from end to end.

And Sara! I even felt a shade more easy in my mind about her; with Graham Smith and those two detectives on the alert, prepared for any unexpected

move, surely she was too well guarded for Adelbron to attempt any of her tricks.

Naturally, while I was thinking, I was doing all I could to free myself. The blood pounded in my head from my efforts to loosen those stout cords, but that was all the good it did me. The professionals who handled me had done a thorough job. All I could do was shift my head from side to side.

And then as I twisted and turned there in the blackness, a pale pencil of light struck across my eyes. Corkscrewing my head about I saw that it came through a chink or hole in the partition, and with a little further exertion, succeeded in getting my eye to it.

Then I understood. The closet lay along the wall of the room in which the séance was taking place, and this was a peep hole probably used by Adelbron or her assistants to speak through when she was faking some spiritualistic stunt. At any rate, it was a boon to me. Through it I could get a fair view of what was taking place in the room beyond.

Sara was still repeating the supposed message of de Guzman; the circle listening attentively, and Adelbron still held her place at the side, immobile, watching.

And then a slight movement of a curtain several feet from her caught my eye, and behind it, peeping, I saw—the face of Adelbron.

I thought I was going mad. It was a delusion of course, Adelbron had not moved, she was still sitting in the same chair she had occupied when I came in, grossly substantial, the essence of materiality. I looked again at the curtain; nothing, and then again that slight movement, and the face appeared again. Adelbron's! Swiftly the meaning of the phenomenon burst on me, and as I realized the significance of it, I broke into a cold sweat.

The seated figure was her substitute, her alibi, wearing the portrait mask, and the real Adelbron was behind the curtain. The switch between them must have been made while the circle was being formed.

The purpose of it was plain. The expression on Adelbron's venomous, triumphant face would have told me if I had not known. The *Fer de Lance* was about to strike. From her hiding place she would discharge one of her poisoned darts. Sara would suddenly collapse. In the movement and excitement of the group, the substitute would vanish and Adelbron take her place. And every one in that group would have to swear that Adelbron had sat

with folded hands. Also no weapon would be discovered.

Sara, my Sara, was in a ghastly trap. I felt that through every fibre, although my brain seemed to be frozen, my faculties paralyzed; and I could tell from her voice that she was drawing to a climax. It was just a question now of how long Adelbron's curiosity would hold.

I don't know much Spanish, but I caught words and phrases here and there, enough to understand that she was speaking as Eugenio de Guzman. "Guilty. . . . You have evaded the law, but you can never evade me. . . . A band of powerful spirits to make your life horrible. . . . Confess—Confess . . . or night and day I shall haunt you."

Her voice broke in the middle of a sentence, and she lay back, silent and motionless apparently in a deep trance.

There was a moment or two of dead silence, and then from the cabinet there emerged an unearthly figure, erect, soldierly, with gray hair, and a sweeping gray mustache, one side of the face lividly scarred. It paused and then enveloped in a strange, spectral light moved slowly across the room.

Even I, who knew the inner mechanism involved, felt a shiver run down my spine. As an apparition

Lord Harry was perfect. He had been carefully rehearsed by Juan Manara in the mannerisms of walk and bearing of the dead General, and his own questionable experience had enabled him to slip into the apartment from the fire escape and in the darkness, make his way into the cabinet.

As he advanced slowly, the curtain at the side shook violently. The possibility that any real person could have eeled into her apartment must have seemed to Adelbron beyond reason. There was a strangled gasping cry, and she flung the curtain aside, backing, edging along the wall.

Making strange, animal sounds, her hands thrust out before her, she groveled there, her whole vast bulk shaking and quivering.

"Do not come near me, I will tell, I will tell. Do not——"

There was the sharp jangle of the telephone bell. The staccato peal with its shrill note of modernity snapped the mystical tension. Like a somnambulist suddenly awakened, Adelbron stared about her, and then pressed a button in the wall. The lights went on, and all the wierd and ghostly effect which Sara and Lord Harry had created vanished as if wiped out with a sponge.

"Mr. Atchison," cried the maid shrilly from the

doorway. "The telephone. At once he must speak."

"Fool!" Madame screamed at her, "Get out."

But at the same moment Graham Smith had seized the other Adelbron. "The double!" he cried, "We've got her now."

The three strange men, Adelbron's guests, jerked him from her. One of Curran's detectives caught her as she tried to run, and the fight was on.

Adelbron had whirled on Sara and snatched the mask from her face. Her voice rang vindictively above the noise the struggling men were making.

"Sara Fosdick!" She caught Sara by the arm, and pushed her forward, "I show you, I show you when you come sticking your nose into my business. You see what you get now."

All the time I had been watching, I had not stopped trying to free myself, and now I suppose, mad with fear and anger, I had a sudden, unnatural strength; for the cords either loosened, or I broke them. My hands were free. I pulled the gag from my mouth and in three seconds had freed my feet.

But in the time that took, I heard one of the detectives with Graham Smith blow his police whistle, and immediately after there was a heavy pounding on the door.



"Madame!" shrieked the maid, "It is the police."

"Hold them imbecile, until I am gone."

Just as I dashed into the room Adelbron, freeing Sara had reached behind that curtain which had hidden her, and caught up something. As she ran with surprising quickness toward a door at the far end of the room, I saw that it was a long-handled lorgnette.

Sara was after her like a panther. She caught the handle and they struggled for it desperately.

But just as I reached them, something happened. The top of the lorgnette, the eye-glass part, went crashing to the floor.

As it did so, Adelbron relaxed her hold on the stick, a look of incredulous horror on her face; it was wiped out by a wave of gray pallor, and she fell heavily at our feet.

"What—what is it?" I could hardly believe my eyes.

"This," Sara held up the lorgnette handle. "It was the weapon she used for her poisoned darts, and in our struggle, she accidentally discharged one into her arm."

I heard Curran's voice and looked up to see him with Ben behind him coming through the door toward which Adelbron had been making when Sara

caught her. He dropped on one knee beside the woman on the floor.

"Dead." He said, as he got up, "How did it happen?"

I explained. By this time the police had entered from the front, and had taken Adelbron's men and her maid away.

"That was her private entrance." Curran pointed to the door through which he had come. "That's a closet, but there's a door at the back which opens into the apartment behind this. Ben found out only an hour or two ago that Adelbron had a lease on that under another name. In that way she had an entrance on the street below this one."

It didn't mean much to me at the moment. I had only one idea and that was to get Sara away. I put my arm around her and hurried her to the outer door.

As we passed through the reception room the telephone rang again. Smith answered it.

"It's Atchison, Tony. Perhaps you'd better speak to him."

I took the receiver.

"Oh, is that you, Dandridge?" Atchison said sharply. "What on earth is the matter? I have Madame's passage all arranged and——"

"It will not be needed, Mr. Atchison. Madame Adelbron accidentally but fatally injured herself with——"

"I understand," quickly. "So Destiny took a hand? Well—the fortunes of war!"

**THE END**



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